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Prologue

Hello, and welcome to the 4th book in my "The Chosen Warrior" series inspired by Erin Hunter's legendary Warriors series! If you're new here, you should know that I use the characters and the areas that are in the actual books, along with my own OC's and potentially own areas that may appear throughout the story. In "Whispering Leaves", I am using the characters and the territories as of the real book Warriors: Power of Three: Outcast. The same events will not happen as they were in the original series, and I do not keep track of the season in them. If you have read the earlier Chosen Warrior books, you may have figured out that the season changes each book.

Please, feel free to quickly read through all my OC's the will appear in this book:

Leafsong - *pale ginger she-cat with a white left paw and white chest and green eyes; ThunderClan warrior; Chosen Warrior*

Redswirl - *black she-cat with green eyes and red fur on one side; ShadowClan warrior*

Swiftclaw - *white she-cat with black tail-tip and blue eyes; WindClan warrior*

Goldenfur - *long-furred pale ginger she-cat with blue eyes; Leafsong's mother; formerly ThunderClan, now in StarClan*

Whitefang (and no, not the wolf.) - *white tom with amber eyes; Leafsong's father; formerly RiverClan, now in StarClan*

Owlheart - *brown she-cat with a white underbelly and chest, amber eyes; Dark Forest warrior*

Rainshine - *silver she-cat with darker gray spots and blue eyes*

(If I notice I forgot any, I will either add them on to this list later, or just put them in a newer posted chapter.)

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Wind dipped into the hollow in the hills, buffeting cats who hardly flinched. Clouds soared across the blue sky, covering the sun every few moments. It was sunhigh, and every cat was gathered around the fresh-kill pile, overfilled with rabbits and a couple squirrels.

A white she-cat with a black tail-tip lay staring up at the moving clouds with a barely eaten rabbit, her blue eyes reflecting them. She blinked as two cats stopped in front of her as they headed to the fresh-kill pile, blocking her view.

“Still wondering where your precious mate is, Swiftclaw?” a ginger tom with white paws sneered.

“Or worrying about how your poor kits are doing?” mocked the other cat, a tabby tom.

Swiftclaw flicked her tail-tip. “You forgot to ask if I’m searching for a sign from StarClan for permission to flay you,” she growled.

“Swiftclaw, just forget about your worthless family,” the ginger tom meowed. “The whole Clan knows that they hated you. Your own mate—”

“Just stop, Weaselfur!” Swiftclaw yowled, pushing herself up and digging her claws into the ground to stop herself from attacking her arrogant Clanmate.

But Weaselfur ignored her. “Your own mate abandoned you, ran *away* from you, and left you to raise those stupid scraps alone.” He snorted. “If that coward would have been smart enough, he would have stayed behind and help you. I guess he doesn’t really love you, and I guess you don’t really love your kits.”

The cats began to pad away to the fresh-kill pile, until Tornear, the tabby, turned around and asked Swiftclaw, “Are you going to finish that rabbit? Or stare at the clouds with it and tell it about your miserable life?”

Swiftclaw yowled with anger and sadness so loudly she heard it echoing. She turned and ran through the gorse tunnel out of the camp. Everything was a blur as she raced to the top of the highest hill, throwing herself on the ground when she got there and screaming into the grass.

“StarClan, why would you do this to me?” she screeched into the grass throughout her yowling. “What did I ever do to deserve this? I love my mate—I truly do! Why did he leave me? I don’t even know where he is now, somewhere out in the world. I’ll never see him again!” She paused to gasp for breath and continued. “And my kits—my poor, poor kits. They are my life, and they aren’t even welcomed in WindClan!”

After a few moments of crying out to the ground, she spun around to face the lake and the territories of the Clans. She looked at each territory separately—WindClan, RiverClan, ShadowClan—and then stopped and stared at ThunderClan territory. Before he had left, Swiftclaw’s mate had told her something about ThunderClan that not many cats knew about. Her mouth shaped into an evil smile.

He told me that he couldn’t do it, not even with help. And I know what happens when you do make it happen. No *cat deserves to live, after what I’ve been through.*

And when I attempt it, I will do it alone.

~*~*~*~*~*~

Prologue is finished! Tada! I'm just going to warn you now, this book is 14 chapters long, and halfway through they get pretty long, so they won't be 500 words like this one, but I hope you will stick through if you are a true fan!

My plan is to try to post one chapter every day until the whole thing is on here, but don't be surprised if I forget to upload one XP So, with that said, I'll see you tomorrow (hopefully)! :D

~Cheese~

Chapter 1

OH WOW LOOK AT THAT I ALREADY ALMOST FORGOT TO POST THE NEXT PART. Anyway enjoy XP

~*~*~*~*~*~

A light breeze blew through the leaves of the trees with the clear blue newleaf sky showing between them. Leafsong padded among the undergrowth, the long grass brushing her paws. Keeping her eyes, ears, and nose focused on searching for prey, she scouted the area. She noticed a plump mouse nibbling away at a seed on a root of a tree, clearly unaware of Leafsong's presence.

She dropped into the hunter's crouch and made her way to the mouse. Once she got a couple of tail-lengths away, she skillfully pounced and killed the prey with a quick nip on its spine. She bent down to take a bite out of her first newleaf catch.

Boom! Crack! Thud!

Leafsong snapped open her eyes from her glorious dream. The thunder outside the warriors' den drowned out the noise of the rain pounding on the roof. Many of the other warriors were starting to wake up, too.

It must be dawn, or the boisterous thunder woke all the Clans up!

She got out of her nest and groomed herself, getting all the moss and tangles out of her fur. Leafsong took a long stretch, pulling each leg in turn, and arched her back.

She was soaked right when she ventured out of the warriors' den. Brambleclaw was waiting under Highledge, where it was a little bit drier, while the warriors settled down to hear the daily patrols.

"I know it is wet here," the ThunderClan deputy shouted to be heard above all the rain, "but it will most likely be better under the

trees. Brightheart," he began ordering patrols, "take Dustpelt and Hazelpaw on the dawn patrol. Sandstorm, take Honeypaw, Cloudtail, and Cinderpaw out hunting. And Sorreltail, you lead Thornclaw and Leafsong on a hunting patrol as well."

Leafsong followed Sorreltail out into the forest, with Thornclaw trailing behind sleepily. *Brambleclaw is right—it is better under the tree,* she mused. She shook her pelt, spraying both cats.

"Hey!" Thornclaw yowled. "I'm already soaked to my bones."

Leafsong purred with amusement. "Sorry," she apologized.

"Alright," Sorreltail broke in. "Let's hunt over by the WindClan border. I don't think anyone has hunted there for some time."

The rain had eased off a little when Leafsong and the patrol reached sight of the stream that marked the border through the trees and undergrowth. They all began to taste the air for any traces of prey. Thornclaw seemed to have scented one because she was looking over at the bank of the stream. He dropped into the hunter's crouch and made his way over to the prey. The golden-brown tabby stopped a couple tail-lengths behind it, waggled his hindquarters, and pounced. He lifted his head and padded back to where Leafsong and Sorreltail stood beside a hazel bush, carrying a water vole.

"Nice catch!" Leafsong congratulated him.

"Thanks," Thornclaw meowed as he buried the fresh-kill.

Leafsong padded closer to the stream where the trees thinned out. She was tasting the air when a pigeon flew above her head. As quick as a flash of lightning, she jumped up, hit the pigeon down with a paw, and nipped its neck while it was stunned.

Sorreltail and Thornclaw were staring at her, their jaws hung open.

"That was *amazing!"* Thornclaw exclaimed.

"How did you do that?" Sorreltail sounded like she didn't believe what just happened.

Leafsong only shrugged. “It was just instinct, I guess.”

She turned around as she heard a yowl across the stream. Breezepaw, a black tom, was on the other side, lashing his tail angrily.

“That is *my* pigeon!” the WindClan apprentice hissed. “Give it back, mouse-hearts!”

Two more cats, both white, but one with a black tail-tip, pushed through the bushes to confront the others.

“Hey, mange-pelts, you heard him. Give him back his pigeon!” the black tail-tipped one snapped.

“And plus, it’s WindClan prey. It came from our territory,” Breezepaw growled matter-of-factly.

Sorreltail stepped forward to right where the bank sloped down. “WindClan prey?” she echoed. “The only reason why you hunt pigeons and squirrels is because of the small but of the woods Firestar gave you! I think you should stick to hunting rabbits—that *is* why WindClan cats are the fastest, right?”

Thornclaw stepped forward, too, to help defend. “And it crossed right over our border, so that means we *can* catch it.”

“Oh, for StarClan’s sake!” muttered Whitetail, the pure white she-cat. “Just let them have it, Breezepaw. They *did* catch it, and we can’t do anything about that. A war between our Clans just because of one piece of prey? Mouse-brained! Now, come on,” she finished. “There’s plenty of other prey on WindClan territory.”

Whitetail turned and pushed through a bush. A moment later Breezepaw left, too, growling with defeat. Only the black tail-tipped she-cat remained. Leafsong noticed uncomfortably that she was staring at her.

“Swiftclaw, isn’t it?” Thornclaw asked, his eyes glimmering with mischief. The WindClan cat flinched, focused her eyes on him, and unsheathed her claws.

But Thornclaw ignored her actions and unsheathed his claws also. “How is your mate? Did he come back to help you with your kits yet? Or are the kits gone, too?”

Swiftclaw answered with a shriek. She leapt across the stream and knocked Thornclaw off her paws. She raked his belly and muzzle, her paws a blur.

No wonder why she is called Swiftclaw! Leafsong thought with a chill.

Whitetail and Breezepaw burst through the bushed, “What in StarClan’s name…? Swiftclaw!” Whitetail yowled.

Breezepaw let out a battle screech and jumped over the stream, claws stretched out, and started to help Swiftclaw claw Thornclaw.

“Breezepaw! Swiftclaw! Stop!” Whitetail yelled as loud as she could above the noise. She jumped the stream and sank her teeth into her apprentice’s tail.

He let out a screech and turned on her. “What was that for?” he hissed.

“What do you think, rabbit-brain?” she spat. Whitetail did the same thing to Swiftclaw. She turned on Whitetail, too. “What is this all about?”

Swiftclaw turned her head. “Nothing,” she muttered.

Whitetail sighed and turned to Thornclaw, who was bleeding and panting heavily on the ground. “What was this about?” she repeated.

Thornclaw forced himself to sit up a little. After a short pause, all he meowed was, “Her mate and kits.”

Swiftclaw hissed and dove for him again.

No! He is hurting enough!

Leafsong jumped in front of Swiftclaw. Her claws sunk into Leafsong’s shoulders, making deep marks, and then threw her aside.

“Does *every* cat want to get hurt?” Swiftclaw spat.

“No,” Sorreltail meowed firmly. “We all need to go. It’s already almost sunhigh.” She snorted. “We’ve all wasted perfect hunting time.”

Whitetail nodded and swept her tail to tell her patrol to cross the stream. Sorreltail helped Thornclaw up and let him lean on his shoulder. Before she padded into the trees, Leafsong remembered Thornclaw’s water vole and her pigeon and went back to get them, the vole buried by a bush close to the stream and the bird laying on the ground. She looked across the rushing water one last time as she gathered both fresh-kills in her mouth. Her eyes widened a little when she saw Swiftclaw looking at her, too, with narrowed eyes, tail lashing, and claws unsheathed. Leafsong turned around and quickly ran to catch up to Sorreltail and Thornclaw.

Great StarClan! Why did Thornclaw provoke Swiftclaw like that? Her life is already bad enough!

Leafsong shook her head to clear her mind. She needed to worry about her Clanmates instead of cats from other Clans. But, no matter how much she tried, Leafsong couldn’t bring herself to forget about Swiftclaw.

“Leafsong!” Sorreltail’s meow sounded ahead. “Watch out for that bramble!”

Too late, Leafsong stumbled on top of the sharp thicket. She pulled herself out, leaving tufts of pale ginger fur behind.

“What’s getting into you, Leafsong?” the tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat asked anxiously. “Are you all right?”

But Leafsong didn’t hear her Clanmate due to her thoughts. *Is she a threat to ThunderClan? Maybe even* all *the Clans? Oh, StarClan, please tell me!*

Chapter 2

Yeah this "uploading every day thing" is *not* going well XP I'll just try to upload whenever I can.

~*~*~*~*~*~

Leafsong flinched as Leafpool put marigold juice on the cuts Swiftclaw gave on her shoulders.

"There," ThunderClan's medicine cat meowed when she was finished. "Go back to the warriors' den and rest. I'll check it tomorrow."

"Thanks, Leafpool," Leafsong meowed gratefully. She stepped carefully past Thornclaw, who was sleeping and covered in cobwebs, and pushed through the bramble screen out to the main clearing.

It was only evening when Leafsong got comfortable in her nest. Despite how awake she was, Leafsong easily slipped into a deep sleep.

Snap!

She opened her eyes and jerked her head up at the sound of a twig splitting in two. Leafsong was surprised to see tall, thick trees with huge, tangling roots all around her. Then she relaxed, realizing she dreamed her war into the Dark Forest.

Leafsong got up and padded over to one of the trees. She was looking up at it when a dark shape was coming straight at her. Leafsong gasped when the cat landed heavily on her, pinning her to the ground with their paws placed firmly on her back.

Leafsong used all her strength to rear up and throw her attacker against the tree trunk. She turned around to see who it was. *Owlheart!*

"What was *that* all about?" Leafsong hissed.

The brown-and-white warrior shook her pelt. "Testing you," she replied calmly. "Didn't I tell you to always be prepared for a fight?"

"I was just-"

Owlheart flicked her tail across Leafsong's mouth. "Whatever. Tonight I'm going to teach you how to ambush others who are unsuspecting one, like I just did." She glared at Leafsong, and the ThunderClan warrior suppressed a shiver. "Come on."

Leafsong followed Owlheart over to a different tree. "What I want you to do is to follow me while you are in the branches without making a sound. Drop on me when you think is the right time, okay?"

Leafsong nodded and climbed up the tree. She waited until the Dark Forest warrior began to walk in a direction. Leafsong concentrated on placing her paws on strong enough branches and jumping across gaps, keeping pace with Owlheart.

It's probably time to drop on her.

Leafsong hurried ahead and waited for Owlheart to get below her. *A few more heartbeats and...*

Thump!

Leafsong landed a mouse-length behind Owlheart. The brown she-cat turned around threw herself at Leafsong, pinning her down. "You were quiet, but a little too late on the drop," Owlheart told her. She let Leafsong up. "You need to drop where I'm going to be when you get there, not when I get there." She swept her tail. "Try again."

Leafsong clambered up another tree and followed Owlheart from above. She got further ahead and waited, muscles ready to drop. When Owlheart got to a certain distance, Leafsong jumped down in front of her where she was going to be in a couple heartbeats. The Dark Forest cat fell with Leafsong's weight on her back and began to purr with satisfaction.

"That's better," she praised when Leafsong got off of her. "Let's try one more time."

I should teach the Clan this! Leafsong thought as she climbed one last tree. *It is* perfect *for ThunderClan cats, being in the forest and all!*

As Owlheart started off, Leafsong went with her. She hurried ahead and waited. When Owlheart was getting close, Leafsong tensed her muscles, ready to drop. She gasped as Owlheart began running through the thick forest.

What?

Leafsong's mouth gaped open in astonishment, but she shook her head to get some determination. *I* can *do it!* she encouraged herself. *I* can*!*

Leafsong hopped from branch to branch, tree to tree, digging her claws into the bark to get a better grip and to go faster. It seemed like a moon before she finally caught up to Owlheart. She saw Owlheart glance up with a shocked expression on and began running even faster.

Great StarClan!

The trees were all a blur as Leafsong went as fast as a rabbit in the branches. She successfully noticed that she had passed Owlheart.

Now's my chance!

Leafsong didn't even stop as she jumped down. She felt a breeze blow through her as she fell, and then the soft fur of Owlheart as she landed squarely on her back and made her legs buckle with the sudden weight. They were both panting heavily.

I feel like my paws are going to fall off!

As Leafsong looked at Owlheart, she noticed that she looked impressed, but a heartbeat later she wiped it off.

"Good job," was all she congratulated. "I'll call you whenever I'm ready."

Leafsong nodded and thumped down and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, she was back in the warriors' den. She was sprawled out, and her nest was ruined; scraps of moss and bracken were everywhere. Some of the warriors around her were stirring.

"Ugh. I didn't get any sleep at *all* last night!" Dustpelt complained.

"Leafsong, you were kicking me all night!" Whitewing groaned.

"Sorry," Leafsong yawned. She groomed out her fur, her muscles aching as she tried.

Oh, Great StarClan, make my muscles better!

Chapter 3

"Nice try," Birchfall meowed as a mouse slipped through Leafsong's paws.

"Better luck next time!" sympathized Graystripe.

Argh! The only reason why I can't catch anything is because I'm so sore.

Birchfall tasted the air and turned around to face an oak tree. A squirrel was sitting on a branch, eating an acorn. He climbed up the trunk on the opposite side of the squirrel and went onto the branch above the furry brown animal, careful not to disturb anything. The light brown tabby tom bunched his muscles, and then jumped onto the branch the squirrel was settled on, quickly nipping its neck before it could realize what was happening and run away.

"Good catch!" Graystripe called as Birchfall climbed back down from the tree with the new kill in his jaws. "Why don't we split up and come back here once we all caught something?"

Birchfall began to bury his fresh-kill. "Fine with me," he agreed. "Leafsong?"

"Sure," the pale ginger she-cat approved.

The long-furred gray tom nodded and padded towards the abandoned Twoleg nest. Birchfall headed for the lake, probably going for the Ancient Oak. Leafsong went in the direction of the WindClan border.

When the gurgling of the stream came into earshot, she tasted the air. Right away she caught a scent of blackbird. She looked over at a juniper berry bush with the dark feathered bird eating the berries that had fallen off of it. Dropping into the hunter's crouch, Leafsong began to creep quietly up to it.

She was getting ready to pounce when the bird flew away in a

flurry of feathers at the sound of a kit yowling. Leafsong padded curiously and almost fearfully towards the sound. She eventually reached a bramble thicket and peeked out from behind it, seeing three kits, who were big enough to be apprentices, playing with each other.

"Got you, Shiningkit!" a gray tom with a white stripe running down his spine exclaimed.

"Not fair, Whitekit!" complained a white she-kit with silver flecks. "You *always* go after me!"

"Yeah!" squeaked a silver she-kit with white flecks. "And what about me? I'm still playing!"

"Fine," Whitekit flicked his short tail. "Then, you're it, Frostkit!" He leapt at her and tapped her on the shoulder with his paw.

Leafsong pricked her ears in surprise. These weren't ThunderClan kits, and they would not be loners, because they had Clan names. She sniffed the air, trying to scent another cat that could be their mother. But only the familiar environment and the kits' scents clung in the air.

Should I take them to the camp? Leafsong pondered. *They have a small trace of WindClan scent, but that could have been blown over the border. The only other thing they smell like are plants.*

Leafsong slowly stepped to where the kits were playing. The gray tom gasped as he saw her and ran to tell his littermates.

"Shiningkit! Frostkit!" he yowled. "Someone's here-run!"

"No, stop!" Leafsong called as the frightened kits hid inside some bracken. She padded slowly closer to them and crouched down so she could see them shivering with fear. "I am not trying to hurt you," she tried to persuade them gently. "I am trying to help you. Who is your mother? Where is she?"

But the three kits only stayed where they were, silently.

Leafsong sighed. *StarClan, please let them trust me! They need this.*

"I can help you by feeding you, training you, and protecting you," she explained softly. The kits began to creep a little closer from under the bracken, all except the one called Frostkit. "If you don't come, you could die out here."

The silver she-kit, Frostkit, flattened her ears against her head. "*Die?*" she echoed in a whisper.

Leafsong nodded, blinking in sympathy and compassion. "If you join my Clan, they will care for you every heartbeat of your lives. You will have a much greater chance of surviving."

The three emerged from the bracken. "Okay," the tom agreed sheepishly. "We will join your...Clan."

They all had different expressions on: Whitekit had suspicion in his green eyes, but still a little excitement and curiosity; Shiningkit's face showed relief and confidence; and Frostkit's blue eyes were swirling with fear and dark thoughts.

"Come on." Leafsong flicked her tail and spun around towards the center of the territory. She paused and glanced back. "You can trust me," she assured the kits. "It is my duty to protect and help cats." A flicker of gladness sparked in Leafsong's chest as the three began to follow slowly at first, but then a little more confidently. Even Frostkit seemed to lighten up a notch.

"Where are we going?" the white she-kit Shiningkit asked.

"To the ThunderClan camp," Leafsong answered. Before they interrogated her, she explained, "ThunderClan is the name of my Clan. The other three Clans are RiverClan, ShadowClan, and WindClan. There is also StarClan-that is where our ancestors are. Cats go there when they die."

"Whoa," muttered Whitekit, the gray tom. "You know a lot of stuff!"

Leafsong purred with amusement. "I know more than that! But someday you'll know everything about the Clans."

The camp came into sight through the brush, and strong cat smell washed over the group.

"Can you smell that?" Leafsong questioned the kits. "We are right by the camp. Cat scent is everywhere."

The three kits were quiet now, looking around the forest. The silver she-kit started to look nervous again.

Leafsong faced her and comforted her by murmuring, "It's okay. There is nothing to be afraid of." She blinked kindly at her. "All Clan cats would never put a claw on a kit, and especially hurt their own Clanmates."

Frostkit took a deep breath and nodded hesitantly. Leafsong swiveled around and headed into the thorn tunnel, the kits trailing slowly after. Right when she entered the camp, she saw almost the whole Clan gathered in the center of the stone hollow.

"Cloudtail, you lead a patrol with Brackenfur and Lionpaw," Brambleclaw was ordering. "Search by the ShadowClan border. Squirrelflight-"

"Leafsong!" The Clan deputy was cut-off by Graystripe's surprised yowl. "There you are! We were just sending out search patrols for you. Where have you-"

The gray warrior stopped when he noticed the three kits-Whitekit and Shiningkit were on one side of Leafsong, their chins held high, while Frostkit was crouched behind her, looking out on the other side.

Firestar was in the clearing, too, who stepped in front of Leafsong. "Who are these kits?" asked the leader. "Where were they at?"

"I found them by the WindClan border, but on our side of the stream," Leafsong announced. "There were no other cats there besides them."

Firestar looked down on them for a while, until he queried, "Do they have names that you know of?"

"Yes," Leafsong replied. She pointed her tail at each kit as she called their name. "This is Whitekit, Shiningkit, and Frostkit."

"How do you know our names?" gasped Whitekit. "We haven't told you yet."

Leafsong shrugged. "I heard you while you three were playing."

Firestar began to sniff them in turn. Whitekit and Shiningkit stood still, but Frostkit jerked away when the flame-colored tom got close to her. He only blinked and backed away.

"How can they have Clan names," he muttered, half to himself, "when they only smell like the forest? There's a hint of WindClan and ThunderClan, but that's expectable." He narrowed his bright green eyes in thought. His gaze raked across the newcomers a couple of times. He nodded as if he agreed to a decision he was thinking of in his mind.

"They look large enough to be apprentices," Firestar announced loud enough for Leafsong to hear him a little bit clearer. He raised his muzzle and yowled, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the Highledge for a Clan meeting!"

Most of the cats were already there, but Leafsong saw Mousefur guide the blind Longtail over to the gathered cats. Millie came out of the nursery and hurried over to sit by her mate Graystripe. Ferncloud and Daisy followed after her, but sat outside the nursery. Their kits-Icekit, Foxkit, Rosekit, and Toadkit-sat around them, pestering them about the meeting. Leafpool and Jaypaw exited out of the medicine through the bramble screen and sat in front of it. A few warriors and apprentices left their dens and took a spot at the back. Firestar swept his tail for the three kits to follow him up to the front of the crowd. Leafsong sat down at the bottom of the slope to the exit.

"Cats of ThunderClan," he began, "three new kits have been brought into this Clan. I will allow them to train as warriors and learn the ways of our ancestors." Firestar turned his attention to the kits. "Whitekit, Shiningkit, and Frostkit, from this day on, until you receive your warrior names, you will be known as Whitepaw, Shiningpaw, and Frostpaw."

Firestar looked around at the Clan. "Graystripe, Whitewing, and

Birchfall, you three are ready to take on an apprentice. You have proven your loyalties countless times. Graystripe, you will be the mentor of Whitepaw, Whitewing will mentor Shiningpaw, and Birchfall will mentor Frostpaw. I expect all of you to pass on all you know to your new apprentices."

As the new mentors padded up to touch noses with their apprentices, the Clan called out the names of the new members.

"Whitepaw! Shiningpaw! Frostpaw!

The young cats followed their mentors in the direction of the fresh-kill pile.

"You three must be very hungry," Birchfall commented. "Have something to eat, and then rest."

Whitewing pointed her tail over to the apprentices' den. "You sleep in there. Fresh nests will be there for you by the time you get done eating. Tomorrow we will show you around the territory."

Leafsong settled down with a wood pigeon between her paws. She watched as all of the apprentices came rushing to meet their new denmates.

See? They are much *safer here than outside the Clans!* Leafsong mused as she bit down into her bird. *They won't regret coming here. They will love it.*

Chapter 4

Leafsong woke to a prod in her side. She opened her eyes to see Brightheart standing over her.

“It’s time to go on dawn patrol,” she told her. “Cloudtail and Cinderpaw are already at the thorn tunnel.”

Brightheart went out into the clearing, and Leafsong shook out her pelt and followed her Clanmate over to the camp exit. As they approached Cloudtail stopped pacing in front of the tunnel and led the way through it to outside the camp.

“Let’s start over at the edge of the ShadowClan border,” the long-furred white tom suggested, already hurrying towards the rival Clan’s territory. “I will be dead before I stop being suspicious of them.”

The patrol padded through the lush forest, drops of dew from the grass and bushes clinging to their pelts. They finally reached the end of ThunderClan territory to where the forest began to turn into pine and cedar trees instead of oak and maple. Cloudtail sprayed ThunderClan scent next to a hawthorn bush, renewing the boundary, and tasted the air when he finished.

He snorted. “ShadowClan needs to renew their scent markers. I can’t even smell their reeking stench, surprisingly.”

“Are you sure about that?”

Cloudtail and the rest of the group turned towards a ShadowClan patrol emerging from behind some holly bushes, with Rowanclaw in front.

“Apparently ThunderClan doesn’t know how to sniff out something,” sniffed Toadfoot, trotting up to stand beside the dark ginger deputy.

A cat was lingering at the back of the hostile patrol in the shadow of a tree, barely visible in the early sunlight, until she stepped out into a spot of sunlight. Leafsong saw the distinctive patch of red fur on the cat's side and knew it was Redswirl, her friend who had saved her from Scarpelt. The black she-cat's green gaze flicked to Leafsong's.

"Well, then you need to hurry up on your patrols to mark your borders," retorted Cloudtail.

Rowanclaw rolled his eyes. "We started on the *other* side of the territory, mouse-brain!"

Redswirl stepped closer to the border a few tail-lengths away from the arguing cats, Leafsong meeting her.

"Do you need something?" Leafsong asked quietly, though the others were too focused on the skirmish to notice.

"Meet me at the old Twoleg nest at the edge of ShadowClan territory tonight," Redswirl told her right away.

Leafsong was about to ask why, but then she noticed the urgency and pleading in the she-cat's eyes. She would tell her when she gets there. Leafsong nodded. "I will be there," she promised.

The two patrols had quit yowling at each other. "Come on, ThunderClan," Cloudtail ordered with a gesture of his head. "We don't have time for this," he muttered, and continued down the border towards the lake.

"It was you who started this in the first place!" Rowanclaw called to them, his fur bristling.

Leafsong cast one last glance back at Redswirl as she began to follow her Clanmates and nodded, promising one more time to be there.

What does she want? she wondered. *Is ShadowClan in trouble? Do they need the Chosen Warrior?*

Leafsong shook her head. *No. If they need me, StarClan would have*

told me about before now, right?

*****

It was almost sunhigh when the patrol got back to the camp, the borders fine. Leafsong padded over to the fresh-kill pile and chose a vole out of the hodgepodge of prey. She settled down next to Squirrelflight, who was sharing a thrush with her mate Brambleclaw. Before Leafsong got a chance to bite into her vole, Whitewing, Birchfall, and Graystripe emerged from the thorn tunnel with their apprentices bouncing in after them.

"Did you see that tree?" Shiningpaw asked excitedly. "It was *huge*!"

"What about the abandoned Twoleg nest? It's so spooky!" Frostpaw whimpered with a shiver.

"How can you two think about that with the reek of ShadowClan still in your nostrils?" Whitepaw spat. "WindClan is not as bad, but ShadowClan? Come *on*!"

"You'll get used to it," Graystripe promised him with a flick of the gray apprentice's ear with his tail-tip. "Now, all of you get something to eat."

The three littermates raced across the clearing to the pile and couched down and bit into their food, all of their eyes gleaming in excitement and joy.

Thank StarClan I found them! Leafsong thought happily. *They're going to love it here—they are safe, well fed, and can learn Clan life, maybe even become warriors one day!*

ThunderClan is lucky to have such loyal and ambitious warriors. *We are going to be the strongest Clan ever!*

Leafsong prayed her thanks to StarClan and began eating her juicy vole, the flesh still warm. She stopped, her mouth full, when she remembered Redswirl.

What does she want? she asked herself again. *Is something wrong?* She sighed. *I will have to wait until tonight. Please, StarClan, let it be a*

good reason!

The pale ginger warrior continued her vole, but the thought and the questions, grower larger and larger, stayed whirling around in her mind as she did.

Chapter 5

Sorry for not posting earlier in the week. I'm getting busy with school work with semester tests coming up in a few weeks, plus my other little projects I'm trying to work on. Please understand ;-;

~*~*~*~*~*~

Leafsong waited for everyone's breathing to slow down or until they began to snore softly. When she was sure that no one was awake, she got out of her nest and quietly made her way to the den entrance, avoiding Brackenfur and Sorreltail, who were curled close together in their nests, tails twined as they slept peacefully.

Leafsong pushed through the branches and went out to the clearing —it was deserted. She went over to the dirtplace tunnel and pushed through the bushes to the outside of the camp, careful to not alarm Dustpelt, who was on guard duty.

She slipped between the undergrowth and trees as she gradually got closer to the boundary with the rival Clan. The scent of ShadowClan washed over her as she reached a familiar plant that marked the border. Leafsong hurried over the scent markers and through the pine forest quietly, hoping no cat will find her. She burst through a hazel bush and stood before the old Twoleg nest. It looked the same way it did last time, when she fought Scarpelt.

The pale ginger she-cat padded into the crumbled down nest, looking for Redswirl. Her friend emerged out of a shadow, her face looking desperate.

"Thank you so much for coming," she sighed with relief. "I—I want —need—to give something to you."

Leafsong was shocked. "Redswirl, no. You don't have to give me anything. Is this about me catching prey for ShadowClan? I'm fine; you do not need to pay me back or anything," she tried to urge the

black she-cat.

“No, Leafsong,” Redswirl protested. “This is *not* about you helping my Clan.” She swallowed and took a deep breath. “I want you to have these kits.”

For the first time, Leafsong noticed two kits behind Redswirl’s back paws—a black tom with amber eyes and a brown she-kit with black spots and blue eyes—who both looked sleepy.

“You’re giving ThunderClan *kits*?” Leafsong’s voice was high in astonishment. “Whose are they? Why doesn’t their mother want them?”

The answer shocked Leafsong.

“They are my kits,” Redswirl told her right away, softly. “But they cannot live in ShadowClan.”

“Why? Is there something wrong?”

Is *ShadowClan in trouble?*

Redswirl hesitated for a moment, but then took a deep breath. “Scarpelt is their father; therefore he is also my mate. I… I actually loved him at one point,” she explained, “but then one day….” Her eyes clouded with sadness and memory as her voice faded away. She shook herself. “They can’t live in ShadowClan because I’m worried that they will find out what really happened to Scarpelt, and they will be looked at differently, and feel terrible. I just want what is best for them.”

Leafsong pressed herself to the other warrior’s flank and rested her tail on her back, nuzzling her cheek for comfort. “It’s okay; I will bring them to ThunderClan, and protect them with all my heart,” she promised gently. “I will not let anything hurt them.”

Redswirl looked Leafsong in her eyes for a heartbeat, and then threw her head forward, burying her muzzle into Leafsong’s neck fur. “Thank you!” she whispered shakily. “Thank you so much. I knew you’d help me.”

Leafsong closed her green eyes. “I would do anything for you. I owe it to you.”

Redswirl pulled back and nudged the two kits toward Leafsong. They stumbled and lied down, wanting to get some sleep. “This one is Dapplekit,” she informed, pointing at the brown she-cat with black spots, “and this one is Darkkit.” She pointed at the black tom, who stretched his jaws wide open in a yawn, his sharp, pointed teeth and pink tongue showing. “Thank you again for doing this,” she meowed gratefully. “I can never repay you.”

Leafsong blinked. “You already have.” She grabbed Dapplekit gently by the scruff and padded over to the exit of the nest, nudging Darkkit on with her paws and tail-tip.

“Wait, there’s one more thing,” Redswirl called after Leafsong. The pale ginger she-cat turned to face her. “Please do not tell them that I am their mother and Scarpelt is their father and they are from ShadowClan. Only tell them when it is time.”

Leafsong hesitantly nodded and headed out again. Redswirl was murmuring too softly for her to hear as she watched her only kits leave, but she could guess:

Goodbye, my precious kits. I will always love you, no matter what. You may see me across the border, but you will only know me as another cat. You will find out the truth about you and your parents when it is time.

~*~*~*~*~*~

#LeafXRedFTW

Chapter 6

Oh HEY look at that I forgot *again.* •-•

~*~*~*~*~*~

The thorn barrier of the camp finally came visible through the tree trunks. The sky was still dark, and a few stars shone. Dawn wouldn't be here for a while.

Leafsong had made the kits roll around in leaves and undergrowth to hide their ShadowClan scent. She hoped that it would stay long enough until ThunderClan scent starts to take over them.

Darkkit stumbled over a bramble tendril straying from a thicket and let out a wail. Leafsong saw Dustpelt's ears perk up, who was still guarding the entrance, and scan his eyes in the direction of the sound, raking his gaze across the brush in search of the creator of it.

"Who's there?" the tabby demanded, taking a few steps forward.

Leafsong got Darkkit to his paws, pushing him out of the undergrowth, and put Dapplekit beside him. "It is just me and two harmless kits," she responded. Dustpelt opened his mouth to reply, but Leafsong cut him off. "This has nothing to do with you."

She picked up Dapplekit again and guided Darkkit through the tunnel past Dustpelt, leaving the warrior standing with a confused and curious expression. No one was in the bottom of the hollow except for Firestar, Brambleclaw, and Sandstorm, who were talking quietly beneath Highledge. Sandstorm noticed Leafsong, and when she noticed the kits, her eyes widened. She turned and murmured, "Firestar," and nodded her muzzle towards the exit.

The flame colored leader snapped his head to face Leafsong and got to his paws. He padded up the slope to her. "Leafsong," Firestar meowed calmly, "you...you found more abandoned kits?"

The ThunderClan warrior put Dapplekit down and dipped her head to her leader. "Firestar, I need to talk to you in private, please," she told him.

Firestar nodded and picked up Darkkit, already knowing it was about the kits. Leafsong picked up the other and followed Firestar up to his den, leaving Brambleclaw and Sandstorm at the bottom of the hollow. They set the kits down on the small cave's floor once they entered into the darkness, who both curled up immediately.

Poor little scraps, Leafsong thought sympathetically. *They must be so tired, having to stay up all night, and travelling more than they should.*

"Where did you find these kits?" demanded Firestar.

Leafsong took a moment to think. "They were near the ShadowClan border," she replied slowly.

That's not entirely a lie.

But Firestar didn't question her. "First kits by WindClan's border," he muttered, almost to himself, "and now ShadowClan? Who would abandon their own kits?" He turned back to Leafsong. "Do they have names that you know of?"

Leafsong stiffened a bit. *What should I tell him? I can't say that Redswirl named them. For all Firestar knows, their mother never wanted them!*

She stopped herself. *Redswirl* does *want them,* she assured herself, *but she is doing this for their own safety.*

"No, I do not know their names," Leafsong lied, "but I can name them."

Firestar nodded. "Very well. Name them, now."

Leafsong took her time, pretending to think up names for the two kits. When a few moments had passed, she pointed her paw at the black tom. "This kit will be named Darkkit," she announced. She pointed at the brown she-kit with black spots. "And this will be Dapplekit."

Firestar nodded again, agreeing. "I'll tell Ferncloud about them, as the oldest queen." He narrowed his eyes at them, thoughtfully. "They don't look old enough to be apprenticed yet. They will have to wait about a moon."

Leafsong looked Firestar in the eye. "I will take care of them and watch them like they are my own kits," the pale ginger she-cat promised as if she were talking to Redswirl. "I will protect them with my life, like every other Clanmate."

The orange leader twitched his whiskers in amusement. "I know you will, Leafsong, along with any other cat, inside or outside the Clan. You are the Chosen Warrior-it is your duty."

The two cats looked at each other for a few more heartbeats, with Leafsong's eyes gleaming at the praise and pride of being such an important cat. Firestar blinked and began to get the kits up.

"I will get them over to the nursery and speak to Ferncloud," he spoke. "I don't know where you've been last night, but it looks like you need plenty of sleep. I will tell Brambleclaw to not include you in any patrols today. You need to rest."

Leafsong dipped her head and meowed, "Thank you, Firestar." She turned around and headed out of the den exit and down the rocks to the bottom of the hollow.

Firestar was just coming out of his den when Leafsong reached the warriors' den. She glanced over her shoulder to see that Darkkit was in Firestar's mouth and Dapplekit was scrambling down the tumble of rocks ahead of Firestar.

Leafsong went inside the den and picked her way through the tangle of sleeping cats to her nest. Just as she lied down, Squirrelflight lifted her head beside her.

"Where were you?" the dark ginger she-cat meowed anxiously. "What happened?"

Leafsong flicked her tail, dismissing the questions. "I'll tell you later," she mumbled half unconsciously, already beginning to fall

asleep. She could barely make out the words her friend spoke over her shoulder as she padded toward the opening to the clearing:

"Oh, Leafsong, you are always wandering off to who-knows-where. You're making me worried, like there is something you aren't telling me."

The last sentence painfully echoed in Leafsong's mind.

Oh, Squirrelflight! Leafsong wailed in her head. *I wish I could tell you. Tell you everything! About Stone and Lichen, and Scarpelt, being friends with Redswirl and promising to take care of her kits.... About being the Chosen Warrior! I'm so sorry....*

All of her senses went away as she finally fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter 7

Leafsong woke abruptly, her green eyes wide open, her claws extended, and her flank going up and down rapidly. The dream she just had—no, the *nightmare*—was horrifying.

The she-cat opened her eyes and saw nothing around her but fog. She stood on a short grass patch. Leafsong glanced around, hoping to see something emerge from the mist.

Giving up, the warrior began to creep forward, making sure nothing was in front of her that she would run in to. She gradually went faster, and even faster. Leafsong was running as fast as she could through the blinding fog, glancing from side to side, panic rising in her throat as she searched for something other than low, thick clouds and springy, dying grass.

A voice behind her made Leafsong stop suddenly in her tracks.

“Leafsong,” it whispered, echoing in the endless stretch of land.

Leafsong looked cautiously over her shoulder and saw a dark ginger she-cat. “Squirrelflight?” she gasped in fear and surprise. She turned around and took a few paces toward her friend, only to stop when she noticed another cat appearing from the fog, her heart skipping a beat in terror.

Is that me*? But I’m right here!*

The two ghostly cats were facing each other now, clearly not knowing Leafsong was watching them.

“Leafsong, you’re making me worried,” meowed Squirrelflight, sadly. “What are you not telling me? What have you been doing?”

The ghost Leafsong hesitated for a moment before she replied back, “I have been seeing this one cat from ShadowClan, Redswirl. She gave me her kits. She needed my help.”

Squirrelflight's fur started to bristle. "Why? Why are you accepting this? Why are you helping Redswirl? She is from a different Clan. Are you not loyal to your Clan?"

"I'm helping her," the clone Leafsong confessed without hesitation, "because I am the Chosen Warrior."

Right away the ghost Squirrelflight unsheathed her claws and tackled the fake Leafsong. She clawed all over her, throwing tufts of pale ginger fur all around. The dark ginger she-cat bit down hard on Leafsong's ear, causing her to toss her head back, and then raked her claws across the losing she-cat's head, beginning at the tip of her muzzle to the back of her head. Squirrelflight sank her claws in one shoulder on the far side of her and buried her teeth in the one closest to her, forcing the struggling she-cat to the ground. As the ghost Leafsong lay on her side, panting to get her breath, Squirrelflight tore her bloodstained claws across her exposed belly, ripping the flesh and causing blood to pour out.

"The Chosen Warrior must die!" she screeched.

The savage she-cat threw her head to Leafsong's throat and sank her teeth into it. The ghost Leafsong laid still, her eyes open, her claws out, and her fur covered with blood, which slowly made its way down, forming a pool around the body.

Squirrelflight looked over at the real Leafsong, who flattened her ears and unsheathed her claws at what she was looking at.

The orange she-cat's teeth, pelt, and claws were stained with countless drops of blood. The thick, dark red liquid was dripping down her mouth, and it seemed like her eyes were on fire.

Leafsong looked down when she felt something touch her paws. The blood spilling had reached her and was lapping at her paws. The stench of blood was so strong that she got a headache. She tried to run away from the sticky substance, but her legs wouldn't budge.

StarClan, help me!

She looked up at Squirrelflight again. She was crouched, ready to

jump.

“The Chosen Warrior must die!” she yowled again, jumping at Leafsong.

The dark ginger ghost slashed Leafsong’s throat once, and then her vision went black.

Leafsong snapped back into reality as a crow squawked loudly from above the camp. She noticed that she was the only one in the warriors’ den. Getting up, she groomed herself and then went out into the clearing.

Right away Leafsong saw Brambleclaw, Graystripe, and Whitepaw near the entrance of the camp. Brambleclaw looked over at her.

“Leafsong, come here,” he called, gesturing to come with his tail.

As Leafsong got closer to the group, she noticed that Graystripe was holding his front paw up.

“What happened?” she asked her Clanmate.

“We were out hunting, and I stepped on a huge thorn,” the long gray furred tom answered, embarrassed. He flipped his paw over.

Leafsong’s eyes grew wide as she saw the injured paw. The thorn was in really deep, and blood weld up around it. “Ouch,” she commented. “That has got to hurt.”

Graystripe shrugged. “It’s nothing,” he stated flatly, but Leafsong could tell that he was really hurting.

“Okay,” Brambleclaw meowed to stop their conversation. “Graystripe, you need to get to the medicine den before that gets infected.”

“But what about hunting?” Whitepaw blurted out.

The deputy flicked his ears in annoyance. “You didn’t let me finish,” he growled. “I was going to ask if you, Leafsong, would take Whitepaw hunting.”

Leafsong dipped her head. “Of course,” she accepted. She turned to Whitepaw. “I’d like to see how your hunting skills are coming along.”

The apprentice perked up his ears. “Well, then, prepare to be amazed!”

“Alright, off with you, Graystripe. To the medicine den,” Brambleclaw ordered.

The dark brown tabby deputy went to Graystripe’s side and offered him his shoulder to lean on. Leafsong watched as the two warriors slowly made their way to the medicine den.

“Hey! Are you coming?”

Leafsong turned around and saw Whitepaw at the top of the hollow near the exit, his tail flicking impatiently.

She rolled her eyes playfully. “I’m coming, I’m coming!” she called.

The two pushed through the thorn tunnel and padded into the forest.

“So, where were you and Graystripe hunting at?” Leafsong asked.

Whitepaw pointed his muzzle towards one side of the forest. “That way, where the hills are…WindClan territory, right?”

Leafsong nodded, impressed. “Yes. You’re doing a very good job of learning about the Clans’ ways and where they are.”

She noticed the apprentice’s gray fur fluff up at the sound of the praise.

“Are the other apprentices treating you nicely?” Leafsong questioned as they began to walk to the WindClan boundary.

“Yeah, they have been all around Shiningpaw and me, asking us all of these questions, waiting to go on patrol with us. It’s awesome!” exclaimed the gray tom with the white stripe running down his back.

“What about Frostpaw?” asked Leafsong, nervously.

Are they including her?

Whitepaw shrugged. “She just stands away from the crowd. I don’t think she likes too much attention. She’s always been quiet. Never talks to any cat.”

Leafsong felt a little heartbroken for the young she-cat. *Frostpaw is shy—I understand and respect that. But she should have some friends in the Clan.*

She snapped out of her thought as Whitepaw touched her ear with his tail and whispered, “Vole!”

She watched as he dropped into the hunter’s crouch and crept up on the prey. Whitepaw got closer and closer to the vole, which was sniffing the ground for some food, until they heard a loud *crack!* The vole froze for a heartbeat. Whitepaw jumped at it, but it was too late—the vole raced away through the undergrowth. The apprentice ran after it, with Leafsong following close behind.

The river and moor came into sight between the trees. Just as the vole burst into the open, Leafsong saw a white paw drag the prey aside. She heard a soft shriek cut off as the cat killed it.

“Cloudtail?” Leafsong asked the stranger.

“Hey, that was *my* vole!” Whitepaw yowled, running out of the undergrowth. Leafsong followed more slowly.

“It’s gone!” Whitepaw announced when Leafsong appeared behind a thistle bush. He was right—no one was there.

Leafsong noticed Whitepaw tasting the air, admiring how clever he was for a young apprentice. “What can you scent?” she asked him.

The mostly-gray apprentice tasted the air for a few more moments. “It smells like a WindClan cat,” Whitepaw replied, “but that makes sense—we are right by the WindClan border.” He tasted the air one more time. “But I *know* the cat who has this scent! I just can’t put a name on it.”

Leafsong tasted the air as well. Didn't she smell this scent before, too? *How can I* not *remember this scent? I know more than the ones in my Clan!*

I guess not this one.

"Well, come on. We can continue hunting, but watch out for that cat," Leafsong warned Whitepaw. "I will tell Firestar about this when we get back."

Whitepaw gave a hesitated nod. "Okay," he agreed.

The two ThunderClan cats headed back into the forest in search of prey there, but the mysterious cat was stuck in her mind.

Who is that cat? Why is it stealing our prey? What is it planning on doing?

Chapter 8

When Leafsong and Whitepaw returned to the camp, the sun was hovering above the hills, acting like it did not want to disappear behind them. The two cats both caught something to add to the already well stocked fresh-kill pile. Leafsong caught a mouse and a robin, and Whitepaw found another vole and successfully killed that.

"I told you that you would find another one," Leafsong had meowed to him once he caught it.

"Yeah, but if I caught the first one, we would have more food," the apprentice with a white stripe had complained.

"Hey, Whitepaw!"

Leafsong looked over at a group of apprentices when she entered the hollow. Lionpaw was the one who called his name.

"Come over here," he invited, beckoning Whitepaw over.

Whitepaw hurried down the slope from the thorn tunnel and trotted over to his friends gathered outside the apprentices' den, sitting next to his sister, Shiningpaw. Leafsong hopefully looked around the group of cats for Frostpaw, but her heart sank as she didn't see the silver she-cat with white dapples. Dismissing the feeling with a shake, she deposited her fresh-kill next to Whitepaw's and scrambled up the crumbled rocks to Firestar's den.

The camp looks so small from up here, Leafsong mused once she got on top of the Highledge. *Lucky Firestar, getting to see this every time he enters or leaves his den!*

"Firestar," Leafsong called through the entrance to the den, "may I come in?"

"Of course," a meow echoed slightly in the small cave.

The warrior stepped into the shadows. When her eyes adjusted to the dim light, she noticed that Brambleclaw was also in here, talking to Firestar.

"What is it, Leafsong?" Firestar asked. Leafsong noticed Firestar's ears and eyes flick over to Brambleclaw. Understanding what he meant, she gave a tiny shake with her head.

No, this does not have to do with me being the Chosen Warrior.

"While I was taking Whitepaw hunting near the WindClan border," she began, "we spotted a cat steal prey right in front of us." Before Firestar started to speak, she continued. "Whitepaw was chasing a vole out of the undergrowth. When it did, we saw a white paw flash out of the side and grab the vole. When we got out of the brush we didn't see anything. The air tasted like WindClan, but we did not recognize the cat's scent. I and even Whitepaw claim that we know the scent."

The tabby deputy's eyes had widened throughout the explanation. "Those stinking rabbit-hearts!" Brambleclaw snarled, his tail lashing. "We have to do something."

Firestar narrowed his eyes in thought. "No. We will not tell Onestar about this until it happens again. What if it was only that one time?" He turned to his deputy. "Keep your fur on, Brambleclaw. It was only one time."

The tabby perked his ears up in surprise. "Only one time?" he repeated. "How do we know they haven't done it more? They could be doing it right now! We have to-"

"Enough, Brambleclaw," the fiery colored leader growled. "Tell all the patrols to keep an eye out for trespassers more clearly."

Brambleclaw sat down and nodded, seeming to force his bristling fur to lie flat.

Firestar turned back to Leafsong, his brilliant green eyes gleaming in the moody light. "Thank you, Leafsong."

Taking that as a dismiss, Leafsong dipped her head and went out of

the den. She padded down the crumbled rocks, causing some loose pebbles to tumble down the slope. She padded aimlessly around the bottom of the hollow, thinking.

Who was that cat? Is all of WindClan stealing our prey? But why would they need to? It's newleaf!

Not looking where she was going, Leafsong tripped in the middle of the clearing. Once she got a hold of her paws again, she saw a kit bouncing around her paws.

"Hi, Songleaf!" the spotted she-kit squeaked.

Leafsong gave a loud *mmrow* of amusement. "It's Leafsong. Hello, Dapplekit. Or should I say Kitdapple?" The energetic kit gave a wide smile of happiness. "How are you doing? It seems like you are already bustling with energy."

The kit didn't answer as a butterfly fluttered past. Dapplekit reached up and tried to catch it, but failed, losing her balance on her hind paws and toppling to the ground. She reached up again and kept flailing her paws at it until it flew high above her head.

Leafsong looked around the clearing. "Where's Darkkit?" she asked the enthusiastic, playful kit.

Dapplekit shrugged. "He said something about 'practicing his hunting on old prey's tails.'"

Leafsong's eyes darted over to the honeysuckle bush where the elders den was. She noticed a dark shape moving in the shadow of the bush behind Mousefur and Longtail, who were basking in the sunlight in the front of their den. Darkkit crept up on Mousefur's tail and pounced. The dusty brown she-cat's head popped up and turned to look at her tail.

"What in StarClan's name do you think you're doing?" the elder snapped. "Can't an elder get some peace and quiet?"

Longtail laid his tail on her shoulder. "Stay calm, Mousefur. I would have thought that you would be used to kits bugging by now."

Mousefur just flicked her tail away from Darkkit and rested her head on her paws, closing her eyes.

Leafsong gave a purr of amusement as Dapplekit ran over to her brother and began to tackle him.

Those two will be great warriors someday. She sighed. *They should have been in ShadowClan, though.*

"Leafsong!"

She snapped her head around towards the camp exit where she heard her name being called. Her nightmare flooded back into Leafsong's mind as she saw the dark ginger she-cat padding gladly towards her.

Oh, StarClan, what does she want?

"Hi, Leafsong," greeted Squirrelflight. She gestured her tail over to the fresh-kill pile. "Do you want to share something with me?"

Leafsong hesitated for a moment. *It was only a nightmare. Squirrelflight would never try to hurt me!* She tried hard to try to convince herself.

"Err...s-sure," the pale ginger she-cat stuttered. She followed Squirrelflight over to the fresh-kill pile, but the nightmare still lingered in her mind.

Squirrelflight picked out a thrush and settled down next to the pile, and Leafsong sat beside her. The she-cat began eating right away, stuffing her face, little tufts of feathers poking out of her mouth. Leafsong took a smaller bite, even though she hadn't eaten all day. She was too wary of Squirrelflight.

Why are you so scared of Squirrelflight? she asked herself. *She is one of your closest friends!*

"So."

The orange she-cat's meow made Leafsong jump.

"Where have you been going?" she asked. "You know it's making me worried."

Leafsong's stomach clenched with fear. She did not want to talk about this. "I-I know that you are worried," she told the curious she-cat uncomfortably next to her. "But I'm sorry, I-I can't tell y-you."

Squirrelflight's ears perked up in shock. "Leafsong, what do you mean that you can't tell me? We are friends, aren't we? We are Clanmates. I can keep a secret."

Leafsong dug her claws into the earth, shut her eyes tight, and flattened her ears against her head. "No, I cannot tell you! You do not know what will happen!"

She pushed herself up and raced out of the camp and into the forest. *If I tell you where I've been, that means that I'm going to have to tell you* everything!

The green-eyed warrior sprinted through the forest. She could fearfully hear Squirrelflight screaming, "Leafsong, come back! Leafsong!" way in the distance.

But Leafsong didn't care. She wanted to get away from that cat as far away as possible. She ran across the entire territory. A waft of ThunderClan scent drifted into her nostrils. She looked ahead-she had reached the border to the unclaimed territory.

Leafsong thought for a moment before she moved any further. *Yes, I want to run away. Away from camp. But running away from the Clans, especially ThunderClan, just seems so* wrong.

This *will be my new life now. I will stay by the borders and stay away from any patrols. I live* alone *now.*

~*~*~*~*~*~

This is the chapter where my hand completely took over. I was not planning on having Leafsong running away *at all.* It added probably two more chapters to this book XP

Chapter 9

Leafsong padded through the forest, searching for a spot to shelter in for the night. The sky was already getting darker through the gaps between the leaves above. She eventually found a large holly bush and made a makeshift nest with the nearby moss she had found, and then curled up inside the bush and closed her eyes.

It feels so different to go to sleep without having warm bodies all around you.

Leafsong opened her eyes at the sound of birdsong nearby. She glanced around herself wildly, wondering where she was. She relaxed when she remembered all that had happened.

Oh, she thought disappointedly. *I thought all of that was another nightmare.*

I wish.

She got up and pushed through the leaves of the holly bush, shaking off the moss clinging to her pelt as well. Leafsong tasted the air and caught the scent of some birds, probably the ones who woke her.

She finally found one of them, a blue jay, sitting on a branch. The pale ginger she-cat crept up to the trunk of the tree and then pushed off with her back legs, jumping onto the tree, and hastily climbed the trunk.

By the time she reached the jay's branch, the bird began to fly away. But Leafsong was swift; she jumped off of the tree trunk where she was holding on to and held a paw out, claws outstretched. She yowled with pure delight as she felt the blue jay fly into her paw and fell down with her through the air. When she felt the ground hit her hind paws, Leafsong slammed her paw with the trapped bird to the ground and killed it with a bite in the neck. It lay limp at her paws.

She turned around, a big smile on her face. "Did you see that, Squir-"

Leafsong stopped as she realized that she was alone, and her happy grin disappeared.

Oh, yeah. I forgot.

She crouched down and looked at her prey. After a moment of hesitating, Leafsong bowed her head.

Thank you, StarClan, she prayed, *for giving me this food and not abandoning me, even if I'm not in ThunderClan anymore. Thank you.*

She sank her teeth into the soft, warm, juicy fresh-kill and pulled back, tearing the bird's flesh.

Leafsong sighed. *It feels so* wrong *to eat prey that was caught a heartbeat before, not taking it to the fresh-kill pile first or giving it to the queens and elders.*

She finally managed to eat all of it and bury the bones and other remains of the corpse. Leafsong licked her whiskers clean and padded aimlessly through the forest.

How do loners and rogues live like this? What do they do all day? It's so boring! There's no patrols, no announcements, no-

Leafsong halted abruptly, stopping her thoughts. She *can't* go back to ThunderClan. Going back could be suicidal. A flash of the bloodstained Squirrelflight came horrifyingly to Leafsong's mind. She quickly shook herself and moved on.

A couple of paw steps forward the green-eyed she-cat paused next to a tree trunk and looked up at the branches. *Maybe I should practice running through the tree tops.* She clawed up the trunk and onto a branch that was in the middle of the others. *Speaking of that,* Leafsong thought as she got ready to hop over to the next tree, *when is Owlheart going to bring me to the Dark Forest again? It has been quite a while. Maybe she got someone else to train instead of me?*

Leafsong braced herself as she pushed off of the branch. For a

heartbeat it felt like she was flying through the air, until her paws landed perfectly on a different branch. She forced herself forward without stopping, dodging branches that were in her way and hopping on the branches that helped her get closer to the next tree and set of branches. Without hesitating when she got to the edge of a branch, Leafsong jumped straight for the branch she was focused on across from her. Once again, it felt like she was an eagle, the wind tugging her fur briefly, and then bark hit her paws.

The one white-pawed she-cat kept jumping from tree to tree like a squirrel until her whole body was aching. She clambered down from the final tree and searched for some moss. She eventually found some growing on a tree in the shade, and was glad that it was damp with water. Leafsong gathered it into a ball and licked it, feeling refreshed with the forest-tasting water.

The pale ginger she-cat found her way back to her original makeshift nest in the holly bush. Even though the sun was still a ways from setting, Leafsong curled up and shut her eyes.

The next day she caught another bird for her fresh-kill and wandered around. Her legs were still sore from the tree-leaping, but she was proud of how well she could do it.

A waft of a familiar scent drifted into Leafsong's nose and made her fur stand up. It wasn't a Clan scent, or even a cat scent. She turned around and saw a large orange shape with a pointed nose and keen eyes, its tail fluffed out with rage.

The shocked loner almost choked at how overwhelming the fox scent was. She crouched down, unsheathed her claws, and bared her teeth.

I may not be a part of ThunderClan anymore, but this is ThunderClan territory, and I need to protect my former Clanmates.

Leafsong launched herself at the menacing fox, ignoring the screams her muscles made to make her stop. She clawed her way on top of the fox's back and hung on tightly as it tried to buck her off. But the former warrior refused to be thrown off and bit down on the fox's ear. The orange creature screamed and flipped onto its back. A

heartbeat before she was crushed, Leafsong jumped off and waited until the attacker was lying on its back, struggling to get up. Taking that as an advantage, the pale ginger she-cat jumped onto the squirming fox and pinned it down with her front paws on its neck and chest, scraping its vulnerable belly with her back claws.

The fox yowled in agony as its belly fur was being stained with its own blood. It began flailing its paws around randomly; Leafsong guessed that that was foxes' ways to beg for mercy. Before Leafsong fully got off of the pleading animal, one of its paws got a lucky shot and scraped the side of her face. She scratched the enemy's muzzle in return and then hopped back, letting the pathetic thing run towards the unclaimed territory.

"And don't come back, flee-pelt!" Leafsong yowled after it. She flinched as her wound on her cheek began to sting, and blood slowly started to drip to the forest floor.

Well, fox-dung, she cursed in her mind. *How am I supposed to know what to use to heal this?*

Wiping her cheek once with her paw, Leafsong continued on wandering the forest.

I should have paid more attention to what Leafpool and Jaypaw used when I was hurt, she sighed. *Let's just hope that I don't get hurt anymore.*

Chapter 10

WHY IS THIS SO LONG???? I went from 2,000 words to FOXDUNG 3,000 WHAAAT

Sorry if you don't really like long chapters ;-;

~*~*~*~*~*~

The shadows in the forest grew as the sun sank below the hills. Leafsong had been wandering ever since she fought the fox, thinking madly about what would help her wound.

Is it catmint? Burdock root? No, no, no! What is it?

She eventually headed back to her makeshift nest in the holly bush. The white-chested she-cat's wound on her cheek still hurt like fire, even though the blood had dried, but she had managed to ignore the pain. Laying her tail on her nose, Leafsong closed her eyes.

StarClan, please help me.

It seemed like a few heartbeats later when she opened her eyes again.

Is it already dawn?

Leafsong got up and stretched, getting ready to go out and hunt, only to realize that she wasn't in the holly bush anymore. In fact, she was not in ThunderClan's forest anymore-not even Clan territory. But a piece of her mind was telling Leafsong that she came here before. Her eyes widened as she recognized the strange place.

I'm in the Dark Forest! I haven't been here in such a long time. Is Owlheart ready for me?

*S*he glanced around at her surroundings-the large, towering trunks of tree, tangled bushes, tussocks of grass....

But no Owlheart. Not even any cats.

Leafsong chose a random direction to walk, searching for any cat in this dreaded place. It felt like she was traveling aimlessly for a moon before she stopped abruptly and perked her ears as the she-cat heard a faint noise.

"Hello?" Leafsong glanced around, scanning everything in nearby. "Is someone there?"

She heard it again. *Is that...whispering?* she pondered. Leafsong looked up to where the soft noise seemed to be coming from and squinted her eyes and flattened her ears as she rapidly thought of what could be the source of the sound.

The whispering seemed like it was multiple whispers, speaking at the same time. They were too faint to understand; you really had to concentrate to even hear the quiet noise.

Nothing but the pitch black sky and the branches of the tall trees were above Leafsong. Nothing moved, not even the long branches high up in the air.

Could I just be imagining it?

Figuring that it was only an illusion, Leafsong continued her adventure of finding a cat.

Where is everyone?

A few moments later, Leafsong heard a yowl ahead of her.

Oh, no. Are the voices back?

Sneaking forward and hiding behind some large bracken fronds, Leafsong saw a large clearing with two cats fighting each other in the center. She watched how confident the two were, placing each paw step firmly, throwing every single strike with their claws determinedly to beat the other.

As the brown one turned around towards Leafsong the get a better angle on her opponent, Leafsong gasped.

Owlheart!

She *was* training another cat!

Leafsong tasted the air to get the scent of the mysterious cat. Her ears shot straight up as she recognized the scent.

That's the WindClan cat that Whitepaw and I saw stealing our prey when we were on patrol!

She growled softly in frustration.

Yes, I am angry that she stole our prey, but I still don't remember her name! How do I not know it?

The white she-cat with a black tail-tip was darting her paws in and out in a steady rhythm. It was so quick that Leafsong could barely keep track of where her paws were at.

Swiftclaw! That's Swiftclaw!

Leafsong felt like a weight had lifted off of her shoulders once she finally remember the WindClan cat's name.

That was driving me crazy.

*S*atisfied, she wrapped her tail around her as she crouched quietly behind the bracken and watched that rest of the training session with Owlheart and Swiftclaw. Once they had finished, the two she-cats stood facing each other, both panting heavily and bleeding from their many wounds. Leafsong strained her ears to hear what they were saying.

"Very good, Swiftclaw," Owlheart praised the warrior, her eyes shining, giving away that she was impressed.

Swiftclaw dipped her head. "Thank you, Owlheart. I am only doing this well because I am learning from the best."

The Dark Forest warrior only twitched her whiskers before continuing. "Have you met Leafsong yet, a ThunderClan warrior?" Leafsong straightened up at the mention of her name.

The WindClan she-cat snorted. "You mean that she-cat who *wants* to get hurt on purpose? Yeah, I've met her."

Owlheart narrowed her eyes for a moment and then flicked an ear, seeming not to care much about what happened. "Anyway, she's supposed to come tonight whenever she falls asleep. I want you two to train together."

"What?" Swiftclaw yowled suddenly. "I have to train with *that* stinking fur ball? No way!"

Owlheart slashed the black tail-tipped she-cat's cheek, hissing, "What I tell you to do, you have to do it. Doesn't WindClan teach warriors to respect their leader, and apprentices to listen to their mentors?"

Swiftclaw only stood still and rolled her eyes.

Good job defending your Clan, Leafsong thought.

The brown-and-white she-cat gave a heavy sigh. "Stay here while I go looking for her. She should already be here." She padded out of the clearing, her tail disappearing through the undergrowth as she did.

Oh, no! I need to get away from here.

Leafsong turned toward where Owlheart went searching for her, taking a wide path around the clearing. Once she was quite a while away, she slowed down her pace, and began to wander aimlessly again. She spun around as she heard paw steps on the grass behind.

"Greetings, Leafsong," Owlheart dipped her head. "Are you ready for your training?"

"Of course," the green-eyed loner answered calmly, acting like she just got here and didn't eavesdrop on Owlheart's conversation with Swiftclaw. She followed the Dark Forest cat through the brush, back to the clearing.

"So, what are you going to teach me tonight?" Leafsong asked, trying to start a casual conversation on the way.

Owlheart flicked her tail. "You are actually going to train with another cat that I am mentoring. You might already know her."

No kidding, Leafsong thought secretly.

"Are we going to do battle training?" she interrogated instead.

"Yes," Owlheart meowed, looking back at the pale ginger she-cat, "we are, actually. It's like you've been spying on us."

Leafsong stifled a gasp, but when she looked at Owlheart's eyes, they seemed to not know that that was true.

"He he, yeah..." she muttered. She quickly changed the subject. "Who am I training with?"

As she said that, they entered the clearing. Swiftclaw was lying in the middle of it, swishing her black-tipped tail back and forth as she made claw marks in the dirt. She looked up as they approached.

"Leafsong, you've met Swiftclaw before, haven't you?" Owlheart asked with a smug look on.

Leafsong flicked an ear. "Yes, I have-multiple times." She looked at the white she-cat in the eye. "You've been stealing ThunderClan prey, haven't you?"

Swiftclaw sat up and sniffed. "Maybe I have, maybe I haven't."

Leafsong flicked her tail-tip irritably. *Stubborn she-cat.*

"All right," Owlheart meowed to break the rising tension, "Swiftclaw, you go on that side,"-she flicked her brown tail to one side of the clearing-"and Leafsong, the other." As the two she-cats walked over to their side, the brown-and-white Dark Forest warrior padded over to another side of the clearing between the two opponents, sitting down with her tail resting across her paws.

"Your goal is to pin down the other cat for ten heartbeats. The boundary is the edge of the clearing." She narrowed her amber eyes. "If you take even *whisker's length* out of the clearing, you lose. Any questions?"

Leafsong hesitated before she asked, "We keep our claws sheathed, right?"

Owlheart's head snapped toward the loner, her eyes as wide as if she had just seen Leafsong fly. "Have you learned *nothing* since you came here?" Her fur began to lift, seeming like she just got insulted. "Dark Forest warriors *always* practice with claws unsheathed. We are not soft-hearted foxes here."

Leafsong winced when Owlheart mocked the Clan cats, but before she could defend them, the warrior continued.

"Practicing with claws means that you get a better feel with your attacks. You know if your claws are doing real damage." Owlheart flicked her ear, signaling that the discussion was over. "Any other stupid questions?"

Leafsong looked down at her paws, feeling ashamed of herself. *I should have known that already.* She risked a glance at Swiftclaw, who was smirking at her. Leafsong forced her fur to stay flat, her pelt starting to burn with embarrassment.

"Guess not," Owlheart muttered. "Ready? Fight!"

Right away, Swiftclaw came charging for Leafsong, her claws gleaming slightly in the gloomy light. Leafsong ran towards her a heartbeat after, and they met each other in the center of the clearing. The two she-cats looked like they were dancing, the way they had their front paws locked together like a reflection, their back legs stomping and tails whipping to stay balanced.

Leafsong began to feel the pressure increasing as Swiftclaw pushed her paws back. Her paws were all the way back by her shoulders when the skinny white she-cat fell on her. They rolled over each other like a wheel a few times, then came to a halt, Leafsong landing on top, pinning Swiftclaw's paws to the ground beside her head and firmly placing a hind paw on her belly.

Is it really already done? Shortest battle ever.

But with only three heartbeats left, Swiftclaw pushed up and

managed to get Leafsong off of her. With Leafsong being unstable, Swiftclaw planted her front paws into the ground and threw the rest of her body at Leafsong.

Wind filled her ears as Leafsong flew across the clearing and then a-*thump!* Pain shot through her body as she landed hard on the dirt floor. She forced herself up and turned to see Swiftclaw charging at her full speed, yowling. Leafsong braced herself for the sudden weight as the attacking cat sprang at her. Hissing and spitting, the she-cats fought, clawing at each other's muzzles and ears.

Leafsong began to get in position to jump to the side of Swiftclaw to take her by surprise, but jerked herself back when she realized that where she was targeting to jump to, there was a gorse bush. *The edge of the clearing!*

Noticing that the foe's paws were unbalanced, Swiftclaw dropped down and pounced at Leafsong's legs, flying underneath her as the pale ginger she-cat toppled forward. She landed with a thud and felt claws prick her skin as Swiftclaw pinned her. Leafsong struggled to get up, but the WindClan cat held her too tightly.

A yowl sounded nearby.

"It has been ten heartbeats," called Owlheart. "Swiftclaw is the winner!"

Swiftclaw bent down. "Nice try, flea-pelt!" she whispered in her ear. She scraped the back of Leafsong's neck before getting off of her and trotted gleefully over to Owlheart.

Leafsong got up slowly and shook out her fur. "Badger-breath," she muttered under her breath as she followed the annoying she-cat.

"Good job-both of you," Owlheart commented. She flicked her tail. "Go. I'll have you come when I am ready." The Dark Forest cat whisked around and padded elsewhere into the tangled forest, her brown tail bobbing steadily.

Swiftclaw didn't say anything to Leafsong as she crouched down, closed her eyes, and disappeared.

Goodbye to you, too.

Leafsong copied her actions. When she felt the soft moss of her nest on her paws and a blade of grass tickling her nose, she opened her eyes. Rays of the sun filtered through the forest; it was past dawn, but earlier than sunhigh. A trickle of blood dripped from her muzzle, and Leafsong felt the blood well up on her neck.

Great, more wounds.

She stretched and searched the forest for prey. The scent of rabbit and the sound of the gurgling stream came to her senses at the same time. Turning her head, she saw the rabbit nibbling on some grass in a small clearing. Leafsong crouched, creeping up on the fat, brown ball of fur. As she pounced, one of her feet tripped over a log, causing her to stumble and startle the rabbit.

It shot towards the stream to escape to the open, where it could run the fastest, but got cut-off as a white paw came out of nowhere and slammed down on the rabbit, breaking its spine.

"Who-?"

At first Leafsong thought the cat was from ThunderClan, making her stomach begin to churn with anxiety about what would happen if a former Clanmate had found her, but then a huge wave of relief overcame her once she saw the familiar white she-cat with the black tail-tip. Her relief then changed to shock and a bit of anger.

"Swiftclaw," Leafsong blinked, "what are you doing her? And on ThunderClan territory?"

Swiftclaw flicked an ear. "Hunting," she answered plainly. "What are you do-"

"You're hunting on ThunderClan territory!" Leafsong exclaimed. "Why? Doesn't WindClan have enough prey?"

"Well, yeah. Of course-it's newleaf." The she-cat's expressions were unreadable.

Anger surged through Leafsong, making her fur bristle. "Then hunt

on your own territory! You *know* it is against the warrior code."

The WindClan cat's black tail-tip flicked with annoyance. "Yeah. What about it?"

The green-eyed loner stared at her. *Is she* serious? *How is she a warrior?*

"Never mind," Leafsong growled. This cat was impossible. "So, where is your patrol?"

Swiftclaw snorted. "Do you *really* think that I'd go with a patrol when I do this?" She didn't give Leafsong time to reply. "Where is *your* patrol?"

Leafsong began to snarl something at her, but then remembered that she wasn't on a patrol either. She kept her mouth shut.

"You're not on one, either? Huh," the white she-cat sniffed. After a few heartbeats of silence, she commented, "I haven't seen you near the border in a few days. What's wrong?"

Leafsong turned her head. "Nothing that has to do with you," she muttered.

"What is wrong?" Swiftclaw repeated more sternly. Leafsong glanced down and saw her unsheathe her claws, causing her belly to lurch.

Now she's threatening *me?* she thought at first. But then she realized, *I can't get hurt anymore. I'm still healing from last night.*

*S*he closed her eyes and lowered her head. "I...I ran away from ThunderClan," she confessed slowly. Knowing Swiftclaw would ask her why, she continued. "It's just that...being in the Clan is too much pressure for me at the moment. Too many things are happening."

Leafsong knew she left out the whole Chosen Warrior thing, but she couldn't reveal that to Swiftclaw, a cat outside of ThunderClan, let alone any cat in ThunderClan besides Leafpool, Jaypaw, and Firestar. For a moment she felt a little homesick.

No. Leaving ThunderClan is good for me.

Swiftclaw narrowed her eyes. "But there has to be at least one cat that caused you to leave." She looked Leafsong dead in the eye. "Who was it?"

"Squirrelflight." Leafsong was shocked at how quickly she had confessed the cat, her friend.

Or former friend.

"What are you going to do about her?" Swiftclaw asked.

"What do you mean?" meowed Leafsong, confused.

Swiftclaw rolled her blue eyes. "How are you going to punish her?" she meowed impatiently.

"Why would I punish her?"

"Because she drove you out!" the WindClan cat hissed. "She deserves it!"

Leafsong stared at her, terrified. *How could I punish a cat who was my best friend, let alone a Clanmate?*

"What would *you* do?" she asked cautiously. Swiftclaw was starting to petrify her.

"Kill her!" the white she-cat hissed. "It's the only way."

Leafsong began to tremble. "You don't understand. She only *caused* me to run away-she didn't chase me out." For a horrifying moment, she could hear Squirrelflight's desperate yowls to call Leafsong back as she ran into the forest. She shook the memory away as she reasoned, "Killing her doesn't seem fair."

Swiftclaw lashed her tail. "It *is* fair. Believe me-I've tried doing it before."

The pale ginger she-cat flattened her ears and opened her mouth. "You *killed* another cat? But that's against the-"

"I didn't kill another cat," Swiftclaw interrupted, spitting. "I *tried* to." The she-cat looked aside and glared, seeming like she was remembering the scene when she did try killing the other cat.

"But you still tried," Leafsong debated. "That's almost the same thing as-"

She stopped herself, remembering all her fights. *You tried to kill before,* a voice inside her head echoed. *You killed Hawkfrost, and you were going to kill Scarpelt if Redswirl hadn't.*

It felt like a rock was in Leafsong's stomach now. *Does that mean that I'm* worse *than Swiftclaw? She only tried to kill once, while I would have killed, and did kill.* Her head began to sway a little. *Does that make me the worst Chosen Warrior ever? Am I doing the right thing?*

Of course I am, she argued. *It was for a good reason. I did it to protect the Clans!*

"Do it, Leafsong! Squirrelflight *does* deserve it."

Owlheart?

The Dark Forest cat's voice hissed in Leafsong's mind, as clear as if she were standing right next to her.

How can I hear her all the way here, and in the waking world?

"That orange mouse never should have made you run away," Owlheart's stern voice continued. "She needs to pay!"

Leafsong began to lighten up a little and agree with the two she-cats.

Yeah, what right does Squirrelflight have to make me run away? Her pelt began to burn with anger, her tail beginning to whisk the grass behind her. *How would she feel if* I *drove her away?*

Leafsong looked up at Swiftclaw and nodded. "Okay, I will kill Squirrelflight." She was surprised at how she had to force the words out.

Isn't this what I want, what needs to happen?

The black tail-tipped she-cat smirked. "Good. Now you have to go back to ThunderCl-"

"No!" Leafsong blurted out. "I can't! I am a loner now, and plus, it's too soon if I did."

Swiftclaw snorted. "Too soon? All you have to do is join the Clan again, lure Squirrelflight away from the camp, kill her, and then run away again. Easy." After a few moments, she turned to leave. "Just do it your way," she muttered, "but I bet it would be a terrible plan." The she-cat leapt the stream and flicked her tail at the dead rabbit. "Oh, and you can keep that. There's plenty other prey over here for me to catch." She pushed through the bushes crowding on the other bank, leaving them swishing for a heartbeat after she disappeared behind then.

Leafsong looked solemnly down at the carcass beside her.

I need *to kill Squirrelflight. She deserves it for StarClan's sake! But why do I feel so guilty even about thinking of doing it?*

She crouched down and began eating the rabbit half-heartedly.

Chapter 11

It has been a moon since Leafsong had left ThunderClan. The days have been monotonous to her. Every day after she woke up she hunted, wandered the woods, jumped through the trees once in a while, hunted again, and then went back to sleep. She hasn't ended up in the Dark Forest since last time, either. She was beginning to want to go back to her Clan.

But what if they won't accept me? Leafsong kept saying in her mind over and over again. *What would they say to me? Would they think I am a traitor? And outcast?*

Then she started thinking about the Clan itself.

Is everyone healthy? Have there been any battles? Any new kits? How are they doing on food and medicine supplies?

Leafsong barely noticed where she was placing her paws until she heard some meows behind her. She quickly hid in a bramble thicket, trying not to hiss as the thorny branches tugged and pulled out her fur as she made her way in. She froze in her place as she heard a voice call back.

"I'm only going to look at something real quick, Leafpool," the cat yowled.

Jaypaw!

"All right, but hurry back!" Leafpool called.

They must be looking for herbs, guessed Leafsong.

She held her breath as Jaypaw's gray tabby pelt came into view between the branches, heading past the bush.

Please don't find me, please don't find me, please don't find me, Leafsong prayed over and over.

To Leafsong's dismay, the medicine cat apprentice halted in front of the bush. Her heart almost stopped as the gray tom spoke her name.

"Leafsong," Jaypaw meowed calmly, "I know you are in there. Come out."

The pale ginger she-cat hesitated for what seemed like another moon before she scrambled out of the thicket. She stared at the cat in astonishment. "How did you-"

"Why did you leave ThunderClan?" Jaypaw interrupted. His pale blue gaze bored right into Leafsong's eyes, as if he could see her as clearly as any other cat.

Leafsong felt really uncomfortable, darting her eyes around, trying not to look at Jaypaw. Her pelt burned with embarrassment. After a while, she muttered, "Squirrelflight drove me out."

"What?" Jaypaw blurted suddenly. "*Squirrelflight drove you out?* Do those words even fit together? I thought you and Squirrelflight were best friends. I doubt she would ever drive you out, especially want you to leave ThunderClan. You need to stop using her as an excuse for you to run away."

The apprentice's lecture made Leafsong's fur stand up in anger. "She *did* drive me out! I hate her! I can't believe we were best friends before. She deserves to die, and will die!"

Leafsong realized a heartbeat too late that she gave away what she was going to do as she saw how terrified and shocked Jaypaw's face went.

"You're going to *kill* her?" His meow was barely more than a whisper. He shook his head slowly. "Leafsong, you *can't* kill her. Come back to the Clan. It's not only your duty to protect ThunderClan, but all of the Clans. You are the Chosen Warrior, Leafsong. It is your destiny."

Leafsong wanted to claw Jaypaw's face. "What's even the point of the Chosen Warrior?" she hissed fiercely. "Can't the Clans worry about their own dangers? Or are they too soft-hearted to save

themselves?"

The two stood there with a great tension growing between them. Leafsong suddenly felt tired, like her energy was pouring out with every word she had said.

She backed away from Jaypaw, growling. "And no, I will *not* go back to ThunderClan. Tell the Clans that their precious Chosen Warrior is no more."

Jaypaw stared at her with eyes the size of the moon. "Leafsong," he sputtered, "don't you know what will happen if the Chosen Warrior dies, or even leaves Clan territory forever?"

The pale ginger she-cat flicked her tail. "I don't know, and I don't care," she meowed coldly. "I may not leave Clan territory forever, but I will *never* return to ThunderClan. The Clans will have to face their own dangers now."

Leafsong swiftly turned around, whisking her tail across Jaypaw's nose, and ran through the forest, where ShadowClan territory was. A rough breeze came down through the leaves above and ruffled her chest fur and blowing into her chin, making her stop and look up into the branches. Soft whispering filled her ears as the leaves overhead swayed slightly.

Are the leaves whispering?

Leafsong remembered the barely audible voices she had heard in the Dark Forest, but this time she could make out some of the words:

"...look out..."

"...beware..."

"...white...claw..."

"...traitor..."

"...ginger..."

Leafsong flattened her ears, ducking, her eyes rose to the leaves. The multiple whispers made it seem louder than a Gathering. When she couldn't take anymore, she let out a loud yowl, not even thinking about being in Clan territory where someone may hear her and possibly find her. The whispers cut-off in unison, making the large forest seem very quiet. The breeze had stopped blowing the leaves. Everything was still and silent. There was no mice venturing around on the floor or birds singing their favorite tunes.

Did they hear the whispering, too? wondered Leafsong. *Or did my yowl just scare them off?*

The loner continued trekking toward the ShadowClan boundary cautiously, hoping that the whispers wouldn't come back. She eventually reached the clearing with the dead tree that marked the border between ShadowClan and ThunderClan. She climbed up the old tree and settled in a hook where two branches shot out of the main trunk, closing her eyes once she got as comfortable as she could get.

*****

Leafsong woke with a start. Her dreams have been filled with murderous cats and loud whispers. She looked up at the night sky through the bare branches, but to her surprise, she didn't see any stars, just pitch black with two glowing green circles.

Wait, green circles in the sky? Leafsong pondered, confused.

"Hello, Leafsong!"

Leafsong's eyes widened as the cat standing over her spoke. Being shocked, the white-chested she-cat lost her balance and fell off the side of the branches. Pain shot through her hind leg as she landed on it when she hit the hard ground. She slowly forced herself to stand and glared up at the she-cat, who was still in Leafsong's cradled sleeping spot.

"Redswirl," she yowled, "what are you doing?"

The black she-cat with red fur on her flank hopped down, landing

gracefully in front of Leafsong.

"I can ask you the same." The ShadowClan warrior looked Leafsong up and down. "What is a ThunderClan cat like you doing, sleeping near a border at night? In fact, what are you even doing outside of camp at night?"

Leafsong looked down at her paws for a moment in silence. *Come on, tell her!* she encouraged herself. *She's a great friend. She needs to know.*

*S*he took a deep breath, preparing herself for Redswirl's reaction. "I left ThunderClan," she confessed. The black she-cat's eyes grew wide, but before she could say anything, Leafsong continued. "I left because I needed a break. There was a cat who was about to find out that I am the Chosen Warrior." The pale ginger she-cat dug her claws into the cool ground. "I hate being the Chosen Warrior. Why didn't StarClan choose someone else?"

Redswirl looked sympathetically into Leafsong's dark green eyes. "Leafsong, I know this is hard for you-"

"*Hard?*" Leafsong spat. "This isn't hard. Not only did I need to leave, but I *wanted* to!"

The ShadowClan warrior started again. "But Leafsong..." Her voice was barely a whisper. "You promised to look after my kits...."

Leafsong stared at the she-cat's saddened face, seeing her own reflection. "Redswirl...." She had forgotten all about Darkkit and Dapplekit. Were they apprentices now? Were they doing alright, fitting in?

"Redswirl," she repeated softly," I-I'm so sorry. But...no...I *can't* go back to ThunderClan."

And if I do, it would be only for revenge on Squirrelflight, to make sure she never finds out.

Redswirl began backing away towards the pine trees on the other side of the border. "You may not think that you belong in ThunderClan, Leafsong," she murmured wistfully, "but you *do*

belong. You are ThunderClan. You are the Clans."

Leafsong blinked after her friend as she disappeared behind a bracken frond.

You are ThunderClan. You are the Clans. Leafsong repeated the last two sayings she heard as she climbed up the dead tree again, which took a while because of her injured hind leg. She lied on the fork between the branches and the trunk, sighing as she closed her eyes and let herself fall asleep.

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You are ThunderClan. You are the Clans.

You are ThunderClan. You are the Clans.

You are ThunderClan. You are the Clans.

Leafsong snapped her eyes open to escape the horrible whispers. But she was very surprised when they didn't stop, and she finally realized that she was not in the tree any longer.

Am I in StarClan?

But I'm not part of ThunderClan anymore!

The she-cat was in the center of a clearing surrounded by bushes and fronds and trees. Some branches of a bramble thicket trembled as a cat appeared into the clearing. Leafsong was stunned at the sight of the shimmering tortoiseshell she-cat.

"Spottedleaf?" she breathed as she scrambled up from her laying position. "What am I doing here? I don't live with ThunderClan anymore. How can I be in StarClan?" A thought suddenly hit her. "I'm not *dead*, am I?" Had a cat killed her in her sleep?

Spottedleaf twitched her whiskers in amusement, but her face stayed the same kind of sadness like it was when she entered. "No, you're fine," she assured. Her mouth stayed shut after that. Her gaze was at her paws, when it usually was focused on Leafsong.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Leafsong questioned, "What's the matter? Why am I here? Are the Clans in trouble?"

Spottedleaf flicked her tail slightly, still looking down. "No, Leafsong," she meowed in a low voice, "this is about you."

As she said that, two cats emerged from the undergrowth and stood beside Spottedleaf, one on each side. Leafsong's stomach began to churn with nostalgia as she recognized the cats. She rushed up to one and buried her nose into her fur.

"Goldenfur!" Leafsong exclaimed. She hurried to the other. "Whitefang! I've missed you both so much!"

When she backed away to her original spot, her heart sank. Both of her parents had solemn faces on them, too. She took a step back, frightened by their melancholy looks, when she was just feeling safe and loved like a kit again. She waited for one of them to speak.

"Leafsong," her mother began, sparkles coming out of her dark ginger fur, "why did you leave ThunderClan?"

A cold chill ran down her spine. "*You, too*?" Leafsong meowed unbelievingly. But she decided to tell them anyway, already knowing that they would convince her to tell why. "I *had* to leave. Don't you see? Squirrelflight was about to find out that I am the Chosen Warrior, if she didn't already figure it out." She hissed, "I bet Jaypaw told her. He's her son-why wouldn't he?"

She noticed the StarClan warriors exchange a quick glance, like they knew something more about ThunderClan than the Clan knew itself.

"And what's this about killing Squirrelflight?" her father asked.

Rage began to rise up in Leafsong, her claws tearing at the grass as she imagined the feeling of sinking them into the orange she-cat's throat. "I *need* to kill her, Whitefang," she insisted. "If she ever finds out, she'll tell all the Clans!"

"Who told you that?" Spottedleaf demanded. Her eyes swirled with a mixture of fear, sadness, and anger.

"Swiftclaw of WindClan," Leafsong replied straightforwardly.

"Anyone else? The tortoiseshell asked, her meow shaking a bit.

Leafsong shifted her paws uncomfortably. "I doubt you know her," she meowed slowly. "Her name is Owlheart."

Spottedleaf's eyes grew wider than the moon, her expression filled with fright. "Owlheart," she breathed. Her voice was barely audible as she replied, "Yes, I do know her." She looked away. "I wish I didn't."

A cold chill ran down Leafsong's spine. *Does this mean that she knows that Owlheart is training me?*

She took a deep breath. "You know, don't you?"

The StarClan cat looked at Leafsong and dipped her head. "Yes, I do," she responded, "but I am not the one to tell you what is right or wrong."

Confusion lit up Leafsong's green eyes. "What do you mean, 'you are not the one'? You are part of StarClan!"

The she-cat only shook her head and meowed reluctantly, "You will know when the time is right," before continuing. "But the point is, Leafsong, is that you need to go back to ThunderClan. You are the *Chosen Warrior*. It is your destiny to save the Clans."

"Leafsong, please." The loner looked over at Goldenfur. "You do not know the dangers that are going to come. Think of your Clanmates. And don't you want to have a great future with a mate and kits? The Clans are losing one of the greatest warriors, Chosen Warrior or not Chosen Warrior."

Leafsong looked sadly at her mother, then at the ground. She noticed Spottedleaf touch her tail-tip to her parents'. Goldenfur looked disappointed.

"Goodbye, Leafsong," she murmured. "Remember what I said." She hurried to touch Leafsong's nose to her own, Whitefang following, and then the two sparkling warriors pushed through the

undergrowth and disappeared. It was only Leafsong and Spottedleaf in the clearing now.

Spottedleaf took a step forward. "Leafsong, I know you've been going through hard times since you found out that you are the Chosen Warrior," her eyes shone brightly now, with a gleam of love in them, "but I haven't introduced you to a very special cat yet."

Leafsong's mind was blank. Why was there a cat in StarClan that was better than the rest?

Fronds shook as a silver she-cat with darker gray spots. Her glittering blue gaze shone with friendliness and love, and her shimmering pelt was faded, but still glossy.

"Leafsong, meet Rainshine," Spottedleaf meowed with a warm voice, "the Chosen Warrior before you."

Leafsong's jaw dropped open as she stared in amazement at the beautiful she-cat. "*You* were the Chosen Warrior before *me*? I thought I was the only one ever!"

Rainshine purred in amusement. "No, of course not. There were many more before me, ever since the dawn of the Clans."

"What did you do?" Leafsong asked excitedly.

The previous Chosen Warrior shrugged. "Fight the evil. Protect the Clans. Same thing you do."

Leafsong studied the StarClan cat's faded shape, which meant that they've been spirits for a certain number of seasons. "How long has it been since you died?"

She looked back at her pelt. She sighed, "Long enough to not remember. Maybe four or five generations back?" She turned back to Leafsong. "But don't worry-other cats are much more faded than this." Rainshine glanced aside and noticed Spottedleaf's impatient look.

"Oh, yes," the silver she-cat meowed awkwardly. Her blue eyes became serious. "Leafsong, Chosen Warrior, you *need* to go back to

ThunderClan. Great dangers are coming. *Please*, Leafsong," she begged. "It is what the Chosen Warrior does: protect the Clans." Leafsong felt her heart pause for a quick moment as she heard the last two sentences. "You are ThunderClan. You are the Clans."

It felt like a moon before Leafsong finally nodded and meowed confidently, "I will return to ThunderClan. I will carry on the responsibilities of Chosen Warrior."

Rainshine's eyes were glowing with love and happiness. "Thank you, Leafsong. But remember"-the surroundings were beginning to fade-"you cannot trust a cat who calls you a friend. Beware of them. And Leafsong"-Rainshine and Spottedleaf were beginning to disappear now-"I will always be with you. If you need help, I will be there."

The two cats were barely visible now. Leafsong nodded and repeated, "I will return to ThunderClan. I will carry out the responsibilities of Chosen Warrior." She meowed clearly when the StarClan cats' sparkle was the only thing left, "I am ThunderClan. I am the Clans."

Chapter 12

Leafsong woke to sunlight pouring onto her face. She woke her head to the shade where the trunk blocked it, clinking and yawning. She noticed the scent of Rainshine still lingering in her nostrils, and remembered what she was going to do today.

I'm coming home!

The pale ginger she-cat hopped down from the crook where she slept, wincing as more pain shot up through her hind leg.

Great StarClan, I hope it's not broken.

Her stomach growled, and she decided to eat something before her Clanmates saw her again. She quickly found a mouse, pounced on it, and ate it, its warm flesh juicy in her mouth.

Alright, she thought to herself. *Now it's time to go back to my Clanmates. To my home.*

The walk to the camp felt like a season, but Leafsong's paws went forward confidently.

This must *be a sign that I missed ThunderClan, surely?*

Before she knew it, Leafsong halted, the camp entrance a whisker from her nose.

This is it, she thought. *I'm going back to my Clan. Returning to the responsibilities of a warrior—of the Chosen Warrior.*

She took a deep breath.

Here we go.

Leafsong pushed numbly through the tunnel in the thorn barrier, not even noticing the small sharp points scratching her skin under her fur. The world went quiet around her, only her pounding heart

audible to her. Light blinded her for a moment as she reached the edge of the tunnel. She stared down into the hollow at her Clanmates.

Ferncloud, Millie, and Daisy, the queens, were gossiping amongst themselves outside the nursery, watching the kits play moss-ball a tail-length away. Leafsong's chest swelled up with happiness as she saw Whitepaw teaching Darkkit battle moves, who was almost as big as the apprentice now.

He'd be becoming an apprentice soon, along with Dapplekit, Leafsong commented. She looked over at Dapplekit, who was attempting to catch the moss ball, but missed and fell backwards as it went through her outstretched paws above her head. Toadkit and Rosekit went racing after it.

Mousefur and Longtail were basking in the newleaf sunlight outside the elders' den, while Graystripe, Spiderleg, and Sorreltail shared fresh-kill underneath Highledge.

The Clan looks so peaceful, Leafsong stated to herself. A heart sinking thought came to her. *Did they look for me? Do they even know I'm gone?*

Do they know that I'm the Chosen Warrior?

Leafsong padded slowly down into the hollow, pausing at the bottom as Sorreltail looked over towards her. Probably thinking that the dawn patrol had come back, she went back to her prey, only to snap her head around as she realized who it was, her amber eyes as wide as an owl's.

"Leafsong?" the tortoiseshell she-cat meowed unbelievably. She glanced as Graystripe and nudged Spiderleg as she stood up. "Leafsong's back!"

Surprised meows of her name echoed around the camp as cats' ears perked up and heads peered out of dens. Clanmates were beginning to rush towards Leafsong and crowd her. She could only make out a few of the many questions that were being thrown at her:

“What happened to you?”

"Are you alright?”

“Where did you go?”

The number of voices was overwhelming Leafsong, and so much attention was making her uncomfortable.

“Silence!”

A yowl rang out behind the crowd. Everyone went quiet and split apart to reveal the fire-colored leader. He took a step closer to Leafsong and dipped his head.

“Welcome back, Leafsong,” Firestar greeted warmly. “We worried about you.”

The one-white-pawed she-cat looked down at her paws, not willing to meet any of the many gazes looking at her.

A yowl and a swish in the warriors’ den was what caused her to look up again.

“Leafsong?” An orange head with a scrap of moss on top jolted out of the warriors’ den, with green eyes full of sleepiness, happiness, and surprise. “Is it really you?”

Leafsong held her breath as the cat that was the traitor charger or her and shoved her nose into Leafsong’s fur on her shoulder.

“Oh, Leafsong!” Squirrelflight yowled cheerfully, her voice muffled by the fur. “I’ve missed you so much! Why did you leave?”

The orange she-cat pulled back and stared at Leafsong. Leafsong stared back, hate growing in her eyes.

Why did I leave? she repeated to herself. *Like you don’t know.* She looked around at her Clanmates, trying to see if they knew her secret. *Did Squirrelflight turn them against me?*

“Squirrelflight,” Firestar’s voice rumbled to his daughter, “leave her

alone." His eyes moved to Leafsong. "You must be tired and hungry. Why don't you have some fresh-kill?"

Squirrelflight hopped over to her side, their pelts disturbingly brushing against each other. Leafsong started dragging her paws in the sand on the hollow's floor. "I'm actually not very hungry," she awkwardly confessed. "Her pelt began to burn and stand up in embarrassment. She felt very strange about only catching prey for herself, whenever she got hungry.

Firestar only nodded and continued. "Feel free to rest for a couple of days. As for everyone else," he finished, "go back to whatever you were doing before you got interrupted. And do not pressure Leafsong into answering any of the questions you have. She will tell us when she is ready."

Leafsong winced when Firestar said "before you got interrupted." *Is he saying that I interrupted the Clan?* Leafsong thought bitterly.

The Clan cats around Leafsong split up and went back to what they were previously doing, Firestar and Squirrelflight staying.

"So, why did you leave?" Squirrelflight asked.

Firestar glared at his daughter. "Squirrelflight," he murmured to her, "that goes for you, too."

The spunky she-cat flattened her ears and turned to Leafsong. "I'll see you later, then," she meowed unenthusiastically, and went over to where Brightheart and Sandstorm were chatting and sharing tongues.

"Visit me whenever you are comfortable to talk," Firestar finished. He dipped his head and went over to the fresh-kill pile by Brambleclaw.

As he left, a smaller figure appeared from behind where he was standing. Jaypaw's sightless eyes were staring at the ground under Leafsong's paws, his ears twitching. "You came back," the gray tabby tom meowed plainly.

Leafsong nodded strangely. "I did." She turned her head to look

down beside her, feeling awkward around the cat she always argues with, the one who told her to come back.

She saw movement at the corner of her eye and felt Jaypaw's pelt brush against hers. She jolted her head towards him, his tail-tip motioning upward. Leafsong guessed that he wanted her to follow. After a moment of hesitation, the she-cat turned fully around to slowly follow the apprentice.

What is this going to be about, now? Leafsong complained in her head.

The one-white-pawed she-cat trailed after Jaypaw. The lake eventually came into view as they exited the undergrowth. Leafsong's jaw fell open as she stared at the beauty in front of her.

The water was sparkling in the late newleaf sunlight, and fish were jumping out and back in the lake every now and then near the center, where it was deepest. The sight of the island where the Gathering took place was gorgeous and almost nostalgic to Leafsong; it made her realized how much she was missing since she left.

The two cats reached the edge of the water and sat down. Leafsong let the cool water lap at her front paws, loving the way it soothed them. She forgot about Jaypaw for a few heartbeats until he started to speak.

"So," the apprentice meowed calmly, his clear, sightless eyes staring over the silent water, "why did you come back?"

Leafsong looked across the lake with him. She stayed quiet before she answered sternly, "I didn't come back because of you, if that's what you're thinking. Others told me to."

"Who?" Jaypaw demanded.

Leafsong's tail began whisking from side to side, stirring up the sand. "It's none of your business," she hissed between gritted teeth. She noticed that Jaypaw tensed up for a moment, then let go.

"Leafsong," he sighed, "you and I both know that I'm going to be a

medicine cat someday, and without Leafpool. Don't you think it is best to start agreeing with each other and to not argue?"

Leafsong froze and glanced at Jaypaw. Her gaze saddened, and her shoulders slugged. "I…" she swallowed. "I guess you are right."

For once, I actually agree *with Jaypaw.*

"Who told you to come back?" the gray tabby tom repeated, more softly this time.

Leafsong still waited a long moment before answering. She eventually murmured, "Swiftclaw and Owlheart."

Jaypaw looked over to her with his blurred, blue eyes, waiting for anymore answers. He turned back to the lake a while after of silence.

I can't give Redswirl away, Leafsong told herself, *and I don't want Jaypaw to know about Rainshine yet.*

It felt like a moon before Jaypaw's voice broke the quietness. "Are you still going to kill Squirrelflight?" His meow echoed in the quiet air.

Rage began boiling under the she-cat's skin at the mention of the orange cat. "Yes," she growled, "I am."

Jaypaw suddenly stood up and faced her. "Leafsong," the tom pleaded, "you can't!"

The pale ginger she-cat copied his actions. "No. You don't understand!" she screeched. "She needs to die. If she finds out that I'm the Chosen Warrior," Leafsong explained more quietly, so no one could overhear their conversation, "she will tell all of the Clans."

The apprentice snorted loudly. "Who told you that?"

"Swiftclaw." She stared at him angrily.

"And you believe her?"

“Of course! She’s my friend.”

“And…you trust her?”

“Yes,” Leafsong replied, annoyed. She didn’t know where this was going. “More than Squirrelflight.”

Jaypaw shook his head. “Leafsong,” he murmured, his blind eyes looking sad, “you *can’t* believe her, and you can’t trust her. You can’t kill Squirrelflight, and you can’t let Swiftclaw and Owlheart control you.”

“What?” Leafsong gasped, surprised. “How are they controlling me?” She put out a paw and moved it. “I say that I am controlling myself, which is normal.”

“Leafsong, put your paw down.” Jaypaw’s fur began bristling, but he managed to force it flat. “They are controlling you by speaking to you. They are convincing you to do the things that they want to do.”

“What do you mean?” Leafsong asked slowly, more serious and alerted.

“I mean that Swiftclaw and Owlheart want you to kill Squirrelflight for some reason,” explained Jaypaw, “for their own good.”

Shock made the she-cat freeze. “They are *using* me?” she whispered.

Jaypaw nodded sympathetically. “You cannot kill Squirrelflight, Leafsong,” he repeated, “and you cannot go to the Dark Forest anymore.”

So much was forcing its way into Leafsong’s head right now. “But… why would Swiftclaw do this to me?”

The water on the shoreline lapped quietly as everything else was silent. “There could only be one reason,” Jaypaw spoke in a low voice. “Swiftclaw must know that you are the Chosen Warrior. She wants to control you to use the power without having it.” His sightless gaze stared into Leafsong’s green eyes. “Leafsong, I think Swiftclaw wants to kill you.”

Chapter 13

This one is long too :c

~*~*~*~*~*~

The only thing that was audible to Leafsong was her own heart beating.

"It can't be!" she wailed. "That's not true!"

Swiftclaw felt like a littermate to Leafsong. She understood her pain, her emotions. Why would she do this?

An owl hooted in the forest and made Leafsong look at the sun. It was slowly sinking behind the hills in WindClan territory.

"We should go back," Jaypaw recommended. "The Gathering is tonight-they'll be getting ready to leave soon." The apprentice turned and headed toward the camp. Leafsong looked out across the lake's still surface before following him.

"-Spiderleg, Cloudtail, and Brightheart."

Leafsong caught Firestar's voice as she entered the camp. He was announcing who was going to attend the Gathering. The flame-colored leader glanced up and the pale ginger she-cat, along with some others. She saw Jaypaw sitting beside Leafpool in front of the warriors' den, acting like nothing had happened.

"Leafsong," Firestar's clear meow echoed around the hollow, "you will be joining us, too." He glanced at her up and down. "If you want to, of course. You could stay and rest."

Leafsong trotted down the slope into the hollow and dipped her head. "I am strong enough to make it there and back," she stated.

Firestar nodded his okay and turned back to the Clan. "We will be leaving for the Gathering now," he declared. Brambleclaw hurried

to the side of his leader to help lead. The two turned in unison and led the Clan out of camp.

"Leafsong!"

The renewed ThunderClan warrior recognized the voice of Squirrelflight.

You cannot kill Squirrelflight.

Jaypaw's quote echoed in her head, and she glanced over at him. Just what she didn't want, the gray tabby tom's clear blue eyes were looking right at her. Her pelt burned; even though she knew the young tom could not see, it was still very uncomfortable with his blind gaze staring at her.

A bunch of orange fur rushed into her vision as Squirrelflight charged her and pushed her nose into Leafsong's light fur.

"Where were you?" she asked, her voice muffled by the fur. She backed away. "I've been dying to talk to you all day!"

Leafsong opened her mouth to speak, but found no words. She was grateful when Graystripe called them to hurry up and pelted up the slope without hesitation.

She guiltily avoided Squirrelflight the entire way to the Gathering. She trotted along the shoreline and admired the beautiful reflection of the full moon and the brightly glowing stars. She sensed something beside her and turned her head to see Jaypaw. They trekked in silence the rest of the way.

The green-eyed she-cat waited her turn behind Dustpelt to cross the tree-bridge, with Jaypaw following her. His littermates, Hollypaw and Lionpaw, helped him jump up and get down. Once everyone made it, Firestar flicked his tail as a signal to enter.

The clearing looked so empty-only WindClan were there. Leafsong watched her Clanmates merge with the others as they greeted their usual enemies with happiness.

A small tap on her side caused Leafsong to turn towards the cat. Her

heart sunk with horror.

"Hello, Leafsong," Swiftclaw greeted normally. "How have you been this past moon?"

Leafsong was frozen with terror. "G-good," she managed to answer simply.

The WindClan cat motioned her black-tipped tail to signal a 'follow me.' "I need to talk to you."

Leafsong reluctantly followed her former friend over to some bushes at the edge of the island. To her surprise, Swiftclaw jumped right into them and to the other side, on the outside of the clearing away from everyone else.

She doesn't want anyone to hear us, Leafsong realized. *Is she going to kill me now?* Her pelt began to bristle, unsure what was going to happen.

"Did you kill Squirrelflight yet?" the white she-cat asked when Leafsong popped out from the bushes.

Leafsong shook her head warily. "No." The response Swiftclaw gave her was shocking.

"Good," she breathed," because I have a plan for that. After the Gathering," the WindClan she-cat schemed quietly, "take Squirrelflight hunting or for a walk along the WindClan border. I will be there, too, hunting. Distract her by talking to her or something and I'll sneak up on her. When you notice me attacking, join in, and give the final blow."

Leafsong was terrified yet amazed at the strategy the cat had come up with. She knew that doing this was wrong, but what if Swiftclaw would kill Leafsong on the spot if she disagreed? She was the Chosen Warrior!

The ThunderClan warrior shut her eyes and thought in her mind, *I am so sorry, Squirrelflight. Please forgive me for what I am going to do.*

*S*he looked at Swiftclaw and meowed as enthusiastically as she

could force, "Alright. That's a brilliant idea." Hurriedly, she spun around and pushed her way through the bushes.

RiverClan and ShadowClan had arrived. Leafsong only took a few paw steps when the spunky orange she-cat came bounding over to her.

"Where were you?" she asked her. "I lost you when we entered the clearing."

Leafsong avoided her green gaze. "Don't worry about it," she mumbled. She noticed Swiftclaw was staring at her from the other side of the clearing where she sat. Same with Jaypaw, who was sitting beside Leafpool by the other medicine cats near the Great Tree.

A yowl came from the Great Tree and the cats began to find a spot to sit and listen. Leafsong hoped that the Clan leaders had a lot of news to tell; she needed all the time to think out what to do.

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The first leader's feet hit the ground, followed by three other sets. The Clan cats murmured their goodbyes and gathered with their Clanmates. RiverClan were first to leave, then WindClan, ShadowClan, and lastly ThunderClan.

Leafsong's feet were as heavy as boulders and it felt like a badger was weighing down her shoulders. She saw Squirrelflight's dark ginger pelt weave through the cats ahead and slowly moved towards her.

I can't believe I'm going to do this. But if I don't I just know that Swiftclaw is going to kill me, the Chosen Warrior! I cannot let that happen.

"Squirrelflight," she called as steadily as she could once she reached her side, "do you want to go for a walk? So we can catch up with the things that happened during the moon that I was gone."

The she-cat's dark green eyes lit up with excitement. "Yes! I would love that. Where shall we go?"

Leafsong kept her eyes locked ahead. She replied calmly, "I was thinking along the WindClan border. The stream is beautiful at night, when the stars are shining."

"Sounds good."

The she-cats stayed to the back of the group. When they leapt the stream, they waited until their Clanmates disappeared behind the undergrowth before they began heading upstream.

"It's so good to finally have a chance to talk to you," Squirrelflight sighed. "I've been dying all day!"

Leafsong stayed silent. She couldn't handle the fact that she was going to kill her best friend.

No, she deserves to die. She needs *to! If she finds out that I am the Chosen Warrior, she'll tell all the Clans.* She shook herself. *Let her live; don't kill her! Swiftclaw and Owlheart are just using me. But why do they want me to kill Squirrelflight? What if they're actually helping me?*

The thoughts in her head were too much for Leafsong. She felt like running away from them, just like she ran away from ThunderClan to protect her, but she knew they would stick to her like burrs. She raised her head and looked up at the shimmering stars showing through the leaves above.

StarClan, help me, please!

As if as an answer, the steady air became broken by a strong wind. Squirrelflight gasped beside her, but she ignored her.

The wind rattled the leaves overhead, and a small whisper became louder and louder each heartbeat. The voices were much clearer than the time in the Dark Forest and near the border with ShadowClan.

"Beware of a white cat," one warned.

Another one cautioned, "A traitor is near."

"An orange squirrel with the flight of the wind can be trusted."

Leafsong froze when she recognized a voice the meowed strongly, "A warrior does not need to kill to win a battle. Drive out the one who you think should be driven."

"Rainshine!" Leafsong yowled up at the leaves with happiness.

"Who's Rainshine?" Squirrelflight asked, clearly confused. "And what is with this wind? Leafsong?"

She guessed that the she-cat could not hear all the voices. She turned her attention back to Rainshine's voice.

"Leafsong, don't you remember what Spottedleaf told you all those moons ago? When you were fighting Hawkfrost?" the dark gray dappled StarClan warrior asked. "She said that StarClan is always with you. *Always*."

"You mean," Leafsong swallowed, "that when I left, you were with me the entire time?"

The spirit purred in amusement with the voices still in the background. "Of course," she answered. "Now, I will stand by you in this fight."

"What?" Leafsong yowled, alarmed. "Now?"

"Have courage, Chosen Warrior. Do what only *you* think is right."

The voices grew louder and covered up Rainshine's. For an odd reason, even though they were louder than ever, Leafsong stood up straight and didn't wince at the noises. Instead of speaking warnings, they were now yowling encouraging words.

"Don't give up."

"StarClan is with you."

"You can beat anyone, if you try hard enough."

"You will win."

"Leafsong?" Squirrelflight's meow brought her attention back to her,

the StarClan voices still going. "Are you okay?"

Leafsong nodded confidently. "I'm perfect. Come on." She continued going upstream, the leaves above still blowing in the wind and the spiritual voices booming in her ears.

The pale ginger she-cat kept glancing warily from side to side, looking for any signs of Swiftclaw. She was ready for her to come. And she knew what she was going to do once she does.

She led her friend to the edge of the stream and sat down.

Swiftclaw's got to attack soon now. We're sitting down-it's perfect.

She leaned in close to Squirrelflight for enough for them to hear each other, but so that the howling wind would hide their conversation.

"Squirrelflight," she revealed, "be ready for an attack soon. Trust me."

"What?" squeaked the she-cat. "You're not going to-"

"No," Leafsong interrupted quickly, "I am not going to attack you, but someone else is." Her eyes glittered as she wished for her to understand. "Please, just trust me."

Squirrelflight's eyes showed more confusion, but she still nodded and agreed with an "Okay." Her muscles tensed and her claws slid out a bit. This is why Leafsong loved about this cat-she always trusts and understands, even if it's just a little.

It seemed like a moon until Leafsong heard a screech and a yowl. She turned toward Squirrelflight, who was being attacked by Swiftclaw. The two she-cats fought until the WindClan cat pinned Squirrelflight to the ground, who let out a gasp.

"Kill her, now, Leafsong!" Swiftclaw yowled to her.

Leafsong noticed her orange friend's eyes widen with surprise; she had just learned that she would have gotten killed by her own Clanmate.

But the pale ginger she-cat only stood with her claws unsheathed, a green flame of anger in her eyes, and responded lowly, "No, Swiftclaw, I will *not* kill my Clanmate and my best friend. It is not what I want-it is what only you and Owlheart want." The wind grew stronger, the leaves blew more rapidly, and the voices of her ancestors swirled around her head.

Swiftclaw's blue eyes were wide with shock, and then gradually narrowed in anger. "Well, I'll have you know, this isn't what I want either," she growled and threw Squirrelflight aside next to a tree. The tossed she-cat stayed low and looked at the two quarreling warriors and listened to their conversation, trying to fill in what was happening. "I want *you*."

The white she-cat leapt at Leafsong with outstretched claws. The ThunderClan warrior tried to dodge aside, but Swiftclaw seemed to expect that and followed Leafsong, pinning her with an unsheathed paw on her neck and one on her white chest. She leaned down to hiss, "She's not the one who needs to die-you are." She lowered her voice so only Leafsong could hear it as she growled, "I know you are the Chosen Warrior, Leafsong, and I know what happens when the Chosen Warrior dies." After a quick pause, Swiftclaw explained, "I want vengeance on the Clans, vengeance for treating me the way they did. They teased me about my mate, how he left me to take care of my kits alone. They teased me about my kits, and forced me to get rid of them, or they would have killed them. After all that had happened, *they* deserve it."

The grip on Leafsong's throat grew tighter, and the claws began to sink into it. She could feel small truckles of blood dripped down her neck. Swiftclaw's eyes had a twinkle of amusement in them.

"Looks like I'm going to beat you again," she purred coldly, "and for the last time."

The wind blew stronger than the one on WindClan's hills, causing the leaves rattle violently against each other. The spiritual voices overtook Leafsong.

StarClan is always *with you.*

Rainshine's meow rang in Leafsong's ears. Strength and courage surged under her pelt, making her push up with all her might and throw Swiftclaw to the ground.

"I won't give up my life and the rest of the Clans' *that* easily!" she spat, her tail lashing from side to side fiercely.

While the WindClan cat was still dizzy, Leafsong bounded to one side and then the other, attempting to confuse her opponent, and leapt at her with enough space to slash her muzzle. The ThunderClan warrior quickly jumped onto the she-cat's back, dug her claws in to get a good grip, and sank her teeth into the white-furred neck, but not deep enough to kill. She pummeled Swiftclaw with her hind legs, forcing her to the ground. Leafsong put all her weight on the she-cat and an unsheathed paw in her head, keeping it on the floor.

"I will not kill you, Swiftclaw," Leafsong panted heavily, "but I will not allow you to stay with the Clans-not even near the Clans. You will have to find a new place to live, away from here."

The defeated cat stayed silent for a long heartbeat. She eventually muttered, "I knew I couldn't do it. One cat destroying all the Clans? Pffft." Her voice was full of sadness and regret as she murmured, almost to herself, "I told him that I would avenge him, that I would take care of our kits. But of course WindClan made me take them away, and shunned me for loving him and carrying his kits."

Leafsong had no clue who Swiftclaw was talking about, but she felt sorry for her. She hopped off of the grieving she-cat and meowed gently, "Look, Swiftclaw, I feel sorry for you, but you can't stay here with the Clans. It will probably be better for you, too."

The white she-cat forced herself up and glared at the warrior. "Fine," she growled lowly, "but I *will* get vengeance on the Clans. The deserve it." She whisked around towards WindClan territory and began stomping to it, but she paused and looked back at Leafsong, love and sorrow swirling in her eyes now. "Just tell my kits I love them," she pleaded, and continued into WindClan.

Confusion made Leafsong freeze. *Who are her kits?*

"Wait!" she yowled, chasing after the departing cat. "Who are your kits?"

She broke out of the trees and brush, expecting to find the she-cat, but Swiftclaw was already fox-lengths ahead, racing up the hill to the end of Clan territory. She reached the top and halted, and Leafsong guessed that she was looking back at the Clans she will never see again and at what lied in front of her. The silhouette against the lightening sky disappeared as it went behind the hill.

Leafsong noticed that Squirrelflight had come up beside her, still bleeding where Swiftclaw had wounded her. "What was all that about?" she asked anxiously, her eyes wide with fright. "Why did Swiftclaw attack you and me?"

"It's nothing," the pale ginger she-cat insisted. She turned around to go back to the camp, but Squirrelflight hurried to intercept her.

"It is *not* nothing," the feisty warrior rasped. "Something is wrong. What is it?"

Leafsong stared into her friend's dark green eyes and eventually gave in after a long moment of silence. "Swiftclaw and I were originally going to kill you," she began and paused, expecting Squirrelflight to make a comment or ask a thousand questions, but the orange she-cat kept looking at Leafsong, understanding and patience in her eyes. She went on, "I guess that was a trap for her to attack me."

She could feel Squirrelflight's question of "Why did she attack you?" nagging at her fur.

"Swiftclaw attacked me because," Leafsong paused and took a deep breath before revealing, "I am the Chosen Warrior."

Squirrelflight's eyes then grew wide with disbelief. She breathed, "What...?"

Leafsong nodded and repeated, more confidently, "I am the Chosen Warrior."

The she-cat's green gaze saddened. "And you didn't tell me, until

now?" Leafsong could recognize the hurt she had in her voice.

"Squirrelflight, I am sorry," Leafsong apologized. "I-I should have told you since I found out I was."

"How long did you know?"

Leafsong had to stop and think. "About four seasons," she replied nervously, her meow high-pitched.

It seemed like she could see Squirrelflight's heart break in the pupils of her eyes. "And you didn't tell me." She looked away, clearly disappointed. "I thought we were friends."

The words pierced Leafsong like thorns. "We are!" she yowled. "I would have told you, but...." She trailed off and began again. "Remember when I ran away from the Clan a moon ago? I...I ran away because I thought that you were going to find out that I'm the Chosen Warrior and tell all the Clans, and maybe eventually kill me. I met Swiftclaw by the border, and I told her what had happened. She said that...that you deserved to die, and needed to die. Tonight at the Gathering, she told me to take you for a walk by the boundary so she could attack you, and then I'd give the last blow." She lowered her head, ashamed of herself. "I'm sorry. I thought that if I told Swiftclaw 'no' to killing you, that she would kill me. Guess that was the plan all along."

Silence rang in Leafsong's ears as she waited for Squirrelflight's reaction. Surprisingly, the orange she-cat rushed forward and shoved her nose into Leafsong's shoulder fur.

"I understand," came her muffled meow. "You are the Chosen Warrior! All the Clans come first for you. It had to be done."

Leafsong's eyes twinkled and she copied her friend's actions. "I am so happy you understand," she murmured. "There is no other cat I can trust other than you." A few more heartbeats had passed until the she-cats pulled away from each other.

Leafsong snorted. "How did I think that you'd tell everyone about me? And kill me? I feel like a mouse-brain now."

Squirrelflight purred and tapped Leafsong on her nose with her paw. "We are all mouse-brains in our own way. Now, come on," she ended, leading the way back to the camp, "everyone is probably wondering where we are, and we need to get these scratches checked."

Leafsong bounded to her Clanmate's side, their pelts brushing each other during the whole trek back.

~*~*~*~*~*~

#LeafXSquirrelFTW as well :3

Chapter 14

LAST CHAPTER *WOOOO*

~*~*~*~*~*~

"What happened?" asked Jaypaw, who was mending Leafsong's wounds. "What did you do?"

"Well, as you can see-err, *sense*," Leafsong corrected herself, "I didn't kill Squirrelflight."

The two were on one side of the medicine den, while Leafpool was taking care of Squirrelflight on the other. They were talking in hushed murmurs.

"Yep," muttered Jaypaw, "that's obvious."

Leafsong forced herself to keep calm as she continued. "And I didn't kill Swiftclaw, either. I told her to leave the Clans and find a new place to live." She narrowed her eyes in thought and confusion as she announced, "She told me to tell her kits that she loved them before she ran off. Does that mean that I know her kits?"

Jaypaw stayed quiet, clearly thinking. "Well," he began, "you did find some kits by the WindClan border, didn't you? And now they're here in ThunderClan."

Leafsong's eyes widened as she realized he was right. "Yes!" she whispered loudly, remembering just in time to keep quiet. "So, Whitepaw, Frostpaw, and Shiningpaw are her kits. But..." a question grew in her mind, "who is their father?"

After a few heartbeats of pondering, a yowl came from outside the den. Leafpool passed by and paused to meow to Leafsong, "You and Squirrelflight can come out and sit in front of the bramble screen with Jaypaw and me."

Following Jaypaw, Leafsong padded out of the den, curious what

was happening, with Squirrelflight close behind.

Firestar was on top of Highledge, who'd yowled the gathering call. Cats were crowding beneath Highledge, picking a spot that best suited them. As she settled down, Leafsong noticed Whitepaw pacing with his head held high, Shiningpaw grooming her pelt, and Frostpaw glancing around nervously, all at the back of the swarm. Ferncloud and Daisy were rapidly grooming Darkkit and Dapplekit, pushing them towards the apprentices at the same time, while Millie sat outside the nursery next to her mate, Graystripe.

"You need to look your best," Ferncloud explained. "This is a very important milestone in your life. Be proud!"

Leafsong's belly began to churn with excitement. *Is this really what I think it is?* she wondered happily.

"Cats of ThunderClan," Firestar began once it became silent, his pelt blazing as the sun touched it, "in this past season, we have had many cats join our Clan, and now it is time to make even better use of them. Whitepaw, Frostpaw, and Shiningpaw, come to the front of the crowd."

Whitepaw went first, leading with his head up high and glittering green eyes. Shiningpaw followed, her silver flecked white fur glistening in the sunlight. Some cats began murmuring to each other about her beauty, her bright blue eyes shimmering. Frostpaw was last, glancing side to side nervously, obviously hating all the attention. Firestar met them and looked at Whitewing.

"Is Shiningpaw ready to become a warrior?" Firestar interrogated.

The white she-cat nodded vigorously. "Yes, she is," she answered. "Her fighting is strong, and her hunting is perfect."

The near-warrior stood up straighter and beamed with pride.

Firestar nodded and turned to Whitepaw's mentor. "Graystripe," he called clearly, "how about Whitepaw?"

Graystripe looked aside at his apprentice with warmth. "Of course he is," the gray warrior replied. "He is a great hunter and an

excellent fighter-a fine edition to the Clan."

Murmurs of agreement rose up amongst the gathered cats. A spark of admiration for the young cat lit in Leafsong's chest. *Maybe we could go hunter together again.*

The leader dipped his head to Graystripe and looked at Birchfall. "And how are Frostpaw's skills?"

The silver she-cat with white flecks looked tense and was shaking a little. Birchfall stayed silent for a few heartbeats.

"Her hunting is almost mastered," the warrior tom announced eventually, "but her fighting will need a little more work. Other than that," he finished, "I think she is fit for a warrior."

Frostpaw was looking sadly at her paws, embarrassed.

Firestar nodded and reassured, "I am sure there will be plenty of times to improve your skills, but at least you have the moves to defend yourself. Carrying on," he continued, raising his muzzle to the sky, where some stars were starting to appear, "I, Firestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these three apprentices." His voice echoed loudly in the hollow. "They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turns." The fire colored cat looked at the three apprentices. "Whitepaw, Shiningpaw, and Frostpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your lives?" There was a brief pause until Leafsong noticed Firestar murmur something to the apprentices.

"I do," they responded together, Frostpaw's meow shaky and less confident than her littermates'.

"Then by the powers of StarClan," Firestar went on, "I give you your warrior names." The fiery tom padded in front of each cat as he named them. "Whitepaw, from this moment you will be known as Whitesnake. StarClan honors your courage and pride." He rested his muzzle on the new warrior's head, mumbled something, and pulled back after the gray tom licked his shoulder, padding over to the

next one. "Shiningpaw, from this moment you will be known as Shiningice. StarClan honors your beauty and fierceness." He set his muzzle on the white and silver dappled she-cat until she licked his shoulder. Firestar padded in front of the last apprentice, who was shaking like an earthquake. "Frostpaw, from this moment you will be known as Frostdrop. StarClan honors your caring and gentleness." When he laid his muzzle on the shaking she-cat, she hesitantly licked his shoulder before he backed away. "We welcome you all as full warriors of ThunderClan."

The hollow exploded with the crying out of the new warriors' names.

"Whitesnake! Shiningice! Frostdrop!"

Leafsong joined in, proud of the new warriors-proud of Swiftclaw's kits.

If only she knew that they are warriors now....

The cheering died and Firestar informed the warriors, "After we eat, you three will guard the camp the whole night silently-no talking. Now, go find a spot to sit at by the other warriors. We have a different ceremony now."

The cats murmured their thanks as their Clanmates congratulated them as they settled down.

"Darkkit, Dapplekit," Firestar beckoned the two kits forward, "come up here."

Leafsong could see that the two kits were shaking with nervousness, but still confident as they walked up to the front of the crowd.

"Darkkit and Dapplekit," he began the apprentice ceremony, "even if you are older than six moons, it is now time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior names, Darkkit, you will be known as Darkpaw, and Dapplekit, you will be known as Dapplepaw." Firestar looked around at the warriors gathered. "Sorreltail," he eventually announced, his gaze on the tortoiseshell, "you will be the mentor of Dapplepaw." His

brilliant green eyes flicked towards the she-cat as he declared, "Squirrelflight, you will be the mentor of Darkpaw."

As cheers rang out of the crowd of cats, Leafsong snapped her head over to Squirrelflight, who was frozen with deep shock, her eyes wide with surprise. "Squirrelflight!" she yowled happily. "Go up there and greet your new apprentice!" She shoved the orange she-cat to her paws and toward the front of the crowd, half urging her forward, half sliding her on her feet. "Go!" she grunted and watched Squirrelflight numbly reach her apprentice with Sorreltail.

The shocked warrior touched noses with Darkpaw, mirroring Sorreltail. When she pulled back, she seemed a bit lost and didn't know what to do, until she decided to go back to Leafsong at the edge of the group with Darkpaw behind her.

Leafsong's heart was swelling with emotion. Her best friend had just been made the mentor of the son of Redswirl, another great friend of hers. She thought that nothing would feel better than that.

"So, how does it feel?" Leafsong asked aloud.

"What?"

Leafsong rolled her eyes playfully and gave a slight snort of exaggeration. "To be a mentor, stupid fur ball!"

Squirrelflight blinked. "Oh! It feels great! Amazing!" She clearly didn't think that what just happened was real. "But..." she went on, her face becoming more serious, "why would Firestar choose me? I'm hurt."

Leafsong shrugged. "Maybe he thinks that you'll heal soon, or he thinks that you're the right choice. To be honest, I think you will be a great mentor." She glanced at Darkpaw, who was already looking at her, and blinked kindly. "Darkpaw is really lucky to have you as a mentor." A small grin appeared on the black tom's face.

"It would be better of you had an apprentice, too," Squirrelflight broke in, causing Leafsong's attention to go back to her. "We could have trained together."

The she-cat's comment took Leafsong by surprise. "I don't think I should even have an apprentice," the white-chested she-cat objected, "because...you know." She glanced awkwardly at Darkpaw, who was still gazing at her with such intense, making her pelt prick uncomfortably.

Squirrelflight nodded, understanding what she was saying. "Of course. That is probably best."

Firestar yowled to get everyone's attention back. "We will now have a feast in honor of so many new warriors. ThunderClan shall thrive in the seasons to come."

The Clan yowled with happiness as they began to attack the fresh-kill pile. Leafsong picked a vole to share with Squirrelflight and Darkpaw, carrying it over to where they waited at the edge of the clearing near the medicine den. She dropped it at Squirrelflight's paws and settled down beside her, Darkpaw on the orange she-cat's other side.

Leafsong looked around the hollow-Mousefur and Longtail were sharing a rabbit on a flat rock on the side of the slope; Graystripe and Millie were eating a thrush; Whitesnake, Frostdrop, and Shiningice were all sharing one big mouse.

Wait, she meowed in her mind, *was Whitesnake looking at me?*

Leafsong pushed the thought aside and tore off a piece of the vole, taking a famished bite out of it. She risked a glance over Squirrelflight's back at Darkpaw. Surprisingly, her pelt didn't prick when she saw that he was already looking at her-instead, her heart began to beat fast, but not with fear or discomfort. What was this feeling?

Leafsong turned back to her prey and ate another bite. Her gaze was roaming the hollow when she noticed sparkling on top of Highledge. Her chest swelled with joy as she realized the faded pelt of Rainshine.

"I am proud of you, Leafsong," the StarClan warrior purred. "You did the right thing." Her voice was as clear as if she was right in

front of Leafsong. But her gaze hardened. "Now make me proud of you again. Make the right choice."

Leafsong's face turned to confusion. She opened her mouth to yowl out, "What do you mean? What right choice?" but then remembered that other cats could hear her.

But Rainshine responded her unspoken questions, hearing her thoughts. "Are you still going to let Owlheart train you?"

Leafsong froze at the sudden question. *She lied to me,* she thought, painfully aware that Rainshine could hear her. *But what else could she do harmfully? All she wants is to train me, to make me a great warrior. And don't I need that? I need all the skill I can get for being the Chosen Warrior.*

"Maybe," she replied in her head the real answer. A memory of Spottedleaf telling her that she was not the cat to tell her if she was right or wrong to let Owlheart train her blasted into Leafsong's head. "Are...are you the cat that tells me if I am right or wrong?"

Leafsong's heart sank as Rainshine shook her head. "It will be an important cat, probably one that you would never have thought to be important." Her meow and figure began to disappear as she finished, "Trust those who you know you can trust, and be wary of those who seem suspicious."

Leafsong was left with a confused face. She wanted to scream at the StarClan cat.

Why don't you just tell me who? And 'be wary of those who seem suspicious'? What in StarClan's name is that supposed to mean?

Leafsong took a smaller bite of the vole and chewed it as she pondered the last part of what the previous Chosen Warrior had said.

'Be wary of those who seem suspicious.' Leafsong repeated it, over and over again.

A horrifying thought stuck her like lightning: *The dangers have been in RiverClan, ShadowClan, WindClan, and even at the horseplace.*

Does...does this mean that the next danger is in ThunderClan?

Leafsong looked around at her Clanmates. All of them seemed so innocent and loyal, ready to fight only to defend their Clan and Clanmates. How could she be suspicious of any of them trying to kill her?

She halfheartedly finished her piece of vole and glanced around the clearing again.

Someone in this hollow is going to try to kill me, she thought with a shudder. *StarClan, you've helped me before, so please help me again!*

~*~*~*~*~*~

The end! I hope you enjoyed reading my book! I was so proud when I finished this, and realized how long half the chapters were... But while I was copying and pasting this from Word I was beginning to regret my writing skill and cursing them xD

But I did love writing this, even though through some parts I had to kind of force me to write. I am currently (trying) to write the 5th book! But do not expect it anytime soon - I started it probably somewhere at the end of school last year and I'm only on the fourth chapter >-< Ugh I feel so bad and guilty.

So yeah, again, thanks for reading and I hope you liked it! Feel free to comment what you liked the most about the book, and how you felt about it.

Thank you!! <3

~Cheese